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OR, THE

Card Queen's Last Game.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"By Heaven! it is not the Deserted Sergeant, but *Buffalo Bill*! He has been a spy in the band and tracked them to death— Ha! there is my gallant Captain Fred Forrester, and he, too, comes with a noose in his hand, but not for my neck, for I shall kill him now and end it!"

As the speaker uttered the words a rifle went slowly up to the shoulder, and the aim was upon the form of a man in uniform, with straps on his shoulders to denote that he was an officer.

But the trigger was not touched by the index finger, and the weapon was quickly lowered with the words:

"No, no, it would be a mercy to kill him, so he

"I VOW BY HIGH HEAVEN, BUFFALO BILL, TO TRACK YOU TO YOUR DEATH."

shall live, for I shall make his living worse than death.

"My God! why do I linger here when all is lost? I must not be taken," and the speaker glided back into the shadow of the timber, and disappeared in the darkness.

The one who spoke these words, uttered with feelings of bitterest hate, was a woman, almost a child, and a beautiful one she seemed, as the light of a flickering fire had fallen upon her face, and revealed, also, her form clad in a riding-habit.

The scene she had gazed upon was an appalling one, for men were struggling for life and death but a short distance away, and the shouts and oaths of maddened humanity mingled with the rattle of revolvers.

It was in a canyon, which might be called a fertile valley, for there were trees, meadow-lands and a swiftly-running brook, all overhung by lofty cliffs that surrounded it.

The canyon ended abruptly at one end, and narrowed to a pass between cliffs at the other.

Where the woman stood was a rude cabin hidden in a clump of timber, and in the background were several horses.

Entering the cabin she dragged out a pack-saddle, which she hastily put upon the back of one of the horses.

Upon another a side-saddle was placed, and leaping to her seat the woman rode away from the cabin, leading the pack-horse and skirting the timber in the background so as to avoid notice.

Soon after she rode out through the pass and as silently as a phantom disappeared in the gloom.

And in the canyon the fight continued until cries for mercy rung out and the rattle of the revolvers was hushed.

What followed were death-scenes and an execution that sent a guilty soul into eternity.

But while the one thus slain faced death, he had said in a voice in which there was no tremor of fear:

"Buffalo Bill, you have given your pledge to me to see that my wife, now to be known as the Renegade Queen of the Sioux, shall receive the letter I have intrusted to your hands?"

"I have," was the firm response.

"Buffalo Bill, I trust you, though you brought me to this fate. I am ready!"

They were the last words of Snow Face, the white chief of the Sioux, for a platoon of cavalrymen sent their bullets into his breast.

The group was a strange one, and men were there whose names have become known throughout the land. Heroes of the border who will long live in poem and story.

It was the end of a trail which Buffalo Bill had pledged himself to follow to the end, and he had kept his pledge.

Assuming to be an outlawed soldier, known as the Deserter Sergeant, whom he closely resembled in face and form, who had often been called the great scout's "double," and whom he had himself slain, he had joined a band of road-agents known as the Brimstone Brotherhood, the chief of whom, tracked to death, lay but a few rods away from where Buffalo Bill stood.

Impersonating the Deserter Sergeant, he had visited the Sioux village, over which Snow Face, the Renegade, ruled, and he, too, had been lured to his death there in that canyon, the outlaws' retreat.

Gathered about in groups, some of them guarding outlaw prisoners, were a score of cavalrymen, men of the —th U. S. Cavalry from Fort Fairview, who had been detailed on special service under the scout and had been known as Buffalo Bill's Boys in Blue.

Bending over a wounded man, tenderly caring for him, was a man of superb physique who had won fame as the Surgeon Scout, and who yet lives in the person of Doctor Frank Powell, the hero of many a border romance, and whose life has been the most exciting and romantic of romances.

Not far from him, silent, standing with arms folded upon his broad breast, like a statue of a soldier, was an army officer whose life was under a cloud.

His name, too, has become known far and wide, but in this romance, as in others, he is called Captain Fred Forrester.

His stern, determined face is strikingly handsome, and his carriage superb, while his manners, though courteous, are cold and reserved.

He, too, has come to the end of a trail that he has followed long and ruthlessly, and the dead outlaw chief lying at his feet almost, in the far bygone, when a boy, he had called *brother*, and looked up to as all that was good and true, to in the end be cruelly deceived.

Apart from the group, half shrinking from sight, was a slender, graceful form, one whose rescue had just been accomplished, for she had, with the beautiful traitress who had led her into a trap, been kidnapped by Captain Brimstone, the road-agent.

And, as she stood there, pale, but beautiful, her eyes timidly sought the face of the young captain, he who had been under a cloud among his fellow-men—who had been called the out-cast officer, and yet whose brave spirit had not

broken under the weight of infamy and humiliation cast upon him.

She had heard the outlaw chief's last words, his confession, that Fred Forrester was not guilty as accused, and she wondered, as she gazed upon the stern, handsome face, why it was not full of sunshine.

And so in that canyon men were dying as the moments went by, graves were dug and filled in, and then came inquiries for the beautiful traitress, who had acted as the tool of the outlaw chief, and, visiting the fort, had lured Kate Kennerley, a belle and heiress, into a trap, pretending to be herself a victim also of the kidnappers.

So search was made for the traitress, whose childlike beauty had been her strongest card, and then it was discovered that she had departed from the canyon, fled into the trackless mountains alone, to escape from those who might be merciless unto her.

But they dreamed not that she had escaped for revenge; they had not measured the strength of her implacable will nor fathomed the deep depravity of her woman's heart.

CHAPTER II.

THE RENEGADE QUEEN.

A STRANGE place for a woman, and a beautiful one, too, in the village of a red-skin tribe.

Yet her surroundings are not altogether Indian, for her home is a comfortable log-cabin with several rooms, with a piazza across its front, where swings a hammock, and where several rustic easy-chairs are found.

The furniture is not such as is found in an Indian tepee, but better than what many a cabin of a well-to-do farmer or rancher contains.

That it was taken on raids, pillaged from trains carrying the baggage of some commandant to his frontier post, did not make it a whit less comfortable to the cabin's mistress.

The cabin looked like the home of refinement, though about it, a mile or two away, were scattered the villages of the Sioux, over whom the former chief held sway, for it was the one-time home of Snow Face, the Renegade.

The woman upon the piazza was his wife.

The scene from her home was a grand one, of valley, winding brook, meadow-lands, a tepee village in the distance, herds of ponies feeding here and there and a background of lofty mountains.

The cabin was at the head of the valley, and was sheltered by overhanging cliffs fringed with mountain pines.

Sketches in pencil, water-colors and other bits of handiwork were upon the cabin walls.

What had been an officer's loss had proven a renegade's gain, and the latter had enjoyed the comfort thereof.

The woman was reading, and was seated in a rude but comfortable rocking-chair the while her eyes now and then turning from the pages of her book to the beauty of the scenery before her, the valley growing dark far away as the sun sunk nearer the mountain range.

She was clad in a suit of buckskin, heavily beaded, fringed and worked with colored porcupine-quills.

The skirt was short, displaying leggings incasing neatly-turned nether limbs, while moccasins were upon her feet.

Strings of beads were about her neck, and in her belt were a pair of silver-mounted revolvers, one on either hip.

The form was the perfection of symmetry and grace, and the head was set haughtily upon the shapely shoulders.

Her hair, of red-gold hue, was braided and hung below her waist, while a jaunty head-dress of feathers rested upon her brow like a crown.

The face was beautiful, and as innocent-looking as a child's; but, for all that, there was decision of character in it most strongly marked.

Her eyes, large, lustrous, yet dreamy, were dark and shaded by longest black lashes, presenting a striking contrast to her auburn hair, and her complexion, pure as a lily, was yet bronzed and tinted with perfect health.

Such was Irma Dean, the wife of the renegade chief whom the reader has seen executed in a canyon under the carbines of a platoon of cavalrymen.

It was several days after the scene in the canyon, and she was alone in her home among the mountains, her red-skin servant having gone over to one of the villages of her people.

Though reading, the woman did not seem wholly interested in her book, for she raised her eyes often from the pages to glance down the valley.

Suddenly her eyes became riveted upon an object, which soon proved to be a horse and rider.

"Ah! I thought it was Douglass; but it is not he!"

She sprung to her feet and took a glass from a hook near, leveling it upon the horseman.

Then her face paled, and she cried excitedly: "My God! what brings that man back here?"

She replaced the glass in the bracket, cast

her book from her and sunk into her chair as though from weakness.

Her beautiful face was now white, and her lips quivered nervously, while her eyes glowed with a strange light.

The horseman, meanwhile, had come nearer, and proved to be a white man.

He was well mounted and armed, and would have been taken for Buffalo Bill, had he been in buckskin.

Instead, he was dressed in a cavalry uniform, wore the stripes of an orderly sergeant upon his arm, and his black sombrero was encircled by a gold cord.

He rode with the air of a man who knew that he was constantly face to face with death.

His eyes scrutinized the cabin and its surroundings as he advanced, and a close observer would have seen that he was ready for instant fight or flight.

He saw the woman, yet appeared not to do so, and soon after rode up to a tree, and throwing the rein of his horse over a limb, dismounted.

Approaching the piazza he did so with his rifle swung to his side, and his hands conveniently near the butts of his revolvers.

Ascending the steps, he raised his sombrero, and said, politely:

"We meet again, madam."

"May I ask why, sir?" the woman demanded, coldly.

She was calm now, yet very pale.

"I am here on a mission to see you, Mrs. Russell," and there was a touch of sadness in his tone.

"Do not call me by that name, sir. How dare you do so?" and her face flushed with anger.

"You are Mrs. Russell, I know. I have come to give you pain, I know, for I am the bearer of sad tidings to you."

"Good God! My husband! He is dead?"

"He is, madam."

"And you are his murderer! By the Heaven above, but you shall die for this, Buffalo Bill," and the Renegade Queen drew a revolver from her belt and leveled it full at the man before her.

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN'S OATH.

THERE was determination in the woman's eye to kill, and the man whose heart she covered with her revolver realized it.

There was no quiver in the small hand that held the extended revolver, and the eye was running along the sight for deadly aim when, quick as a flash, the man dropped to the ground, and the bullet flew over his head.

In an instant he had seized the revolver and wrenched it from the woman's hand, while he said, sternly:

"Hear what I have to say, madam!"

"Don't force me to be cruel toward a woman, for I would not be."

He took the other revolver from her belt, and she sunk down into her chair, her form quivering, her eyes glaring at him, while her teeth almost cut into her lips to force herself to calmness.

"I will listen," she said, with an effort.

"I came here as the Deserter Sergeant, and yet, as you suspected, I am Buffalo Bill."

"I took advantage of my striking resemblance to the Deserter, whom I killed in a personal encounter, to play his part, and as such I was admitted to membership in the band of the Brimstone Brotherhood."

"I entered their ranks as a spy, to destroy them, and was sent here by their chief, whom you knew as Edmund Allyn."

"I formed an alliance between your husband and Captain Brimstone, and then I struck my blow."

"But it was not as successful as I wished, for Allyn escaped and it did not include the capture of your husband."

"I tried again, with a special detail of soldiers known as my Boys in Blue, and this time the result was all I could hope."

"My husband is dead?" and the words were uttered with enforced calmness.

"You shall hear all, madam. I again played the part of the Deserter Sergeant, and met Captain Brimstone also playing a part, that of an itinerant parson."

"As such, in company with a woman, who is a beautiful fiend from all I know of her, he went to Fort Fairview and kidnapped a young lady, who is rich, and able to pay a large ransom."

"This was while I was here, your husband's prisoner, for he suspected me, as you know."

"You were good enough to set me free. He followed on my trail, and, by a strange combination of circumstances, I met an officer on the trail of the kidnappers of Miss Kennerley, and the result was that we went to the retreat near of my Boys in Blue, ambushed your husband and his red-skin warriors, who were upon my trail, and captured the chief."

"Then he is not dead?" almost shrieked the woman.

"Be calm, I beg of you, and hear all."

"Go on, sir, for I am perfectly calm," was the answer, and she spoke the truth; but it was a calmness that was dangerous.

"We then went on to the canyon where Captain Brimstone had his retreat, and surprised him with his men."

"And Edmund Allyn—I mean Captain Brimstone?"

"Was mortally wounded, and died soon after."

"Ah!"

"Before dying he made a confession, to the effect that he had killed the rich old gentleman whom your husband was arrested for the murder of, and had plotted so that he would be suspected."

"Thank God Douglass was innocent of that crime, as he always said he was."

"Yes, Edmund Allyn committed the murder, got the money, and intended that Douglass Dean should hang for it, and thus he would make you his wife."

"You pledged yourself to marry him if he would aid Dean to escape, which he did, but you broke faith with him, fled with the man you loved, and left all to believe that you had been drowned."

"That was why you and your husband dreaded Captain Brimstone as you did."

"I pity your husband, for he was embittered by the charge against him, and fled with you to the West, and, somehow, became the white chief of the Sioux."

"Allyn came West, to save himself from the gallows for crimes committed; he became a gambler, and then a road-agent, chief of the Brimstone Brotherhood."

"I trailed him to his death in Eagle Canyon, three nights ago, and your husband also met his death there."

She gave a moan, but said nothing, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"I had my orders to execute him, and also Edmund Allyn, when captured, and so I detailed a platoon of my Boys in Blue as an execution squad."

"Your husband asked to write you a letter, and I gave him my pledge that I would deliver it to you; hence I am here, for, still believed to be the Deserter Sergeant by your warriors on sentinel duty, I passed through their lines unsuspected."

"Here is the letter, and I ask you to give me your pledge that I shall go free from this place, and unfollowed by your braves until I have been gone several hours."

"If you refuse, I shall destroy this letter, and, as you are in my power, I can bind and gag you, and thus make my escape. Have I your pledge?"

She arose calmly, while her eyes turned wistfully upon the letter.

The look of utter misery in her face touched Buffalo Bill to the heart, and he said:

"You will give me the pledge I ask, will you not, for God knows I pity you, and do not wish to act roughly toward you."

"I know that your love brought you to these wilds, and I now know that, being accused of crime when innocent, made your husband what he became, a renegade to his own race, chief of a red-skin tribe. Will you let me go unmolested?"

"Yes, I pledge you to do so. But did you have my husband shot?"

"I did so in the discharge of my orders and duty, and he died like a man."

"I believe that, sir, for he knew no fear. You can go now; but, Buffalo Bill, hear my oath," and, dropping upon her knees, the Renegade Queen raised her clasped hands, and cried:

"I vow by high Heaven, Buffalo Bill, to track you to your death, and when you are in my power, may God have mercy upon you, for I will not."

"Give me that letter from my dead husband, my murdered husband, and go!"

The scout placed the letter in her hand and turned away.

An hour after he had passed the sentinels at the outpost of the Indian village, and was riding through the darkness back to Fort Fairview.

CHAPTER IV. THE LIFTED CLOUD.

AMONG the frontier posts from north to south, none were pleasanter, or more sought after by officers and men as a station, than was Fort Fairview.

Its situation was delightful, for the prairies stretched away from its walls to the southward, and rolling timber lands were to the northward.

There was a river, with bold, picturesque scenery, brooks, valleys and hills round about, and thus the surroundings were most charming to the eye.

It was, at the time we write of, a post of danger, however, and the headquarters for a string of posts and forts stretching north and south for several hundred miles.

It was strongly built, of stockade walls and earth forts, there were several batteries stationed there, a regiment of cavalry, and the crack one of the army, too, with a couple of regiments of infantry and a company of scouts with Buffalo Bill as chief.

Colonel Cassidy, the commandant of the post, was every inch a soldier, a bachelor, and a courteous gentleman.

He did his duty, and expected every man in command to do the same.

The officers' quarters about the fort were large and well located, the barracks all that the soldiers could desire, and then came a little settlement known as "the village," where the sutler had his store and home, the teamsters and hangers-on were quartered, with the wives of the married soldiers to add to the community.

So it was that Fort Fairview was a pleasant abiding-place, and yet one there had found it a hell on earth, to speak forcibly.

This one was a young man who had been a favorite with his equals, a pet of the ladies, and the idol of his men.

He was called a dandy, and yet was acknowledged to be the best soldier in the command, for he never neglected his duties, though when off duty devoted himself wholly to pleasure.

Handsome as an Adonis, formed like a Hercules, courteous, elegant and dashing, all could not but admire; but he was known to be fast, "rapid as the wind," the junior officers said.

He had a stable full of fine horses, his quarters were furnished like the *boudoir* of a city belle, for they contained paintings, *bric-a-brac*, curios, and any amount of trophies of the hunt and travel, with guns, rifles, revolvers and swords.

He had a cook, valet and groom, and lived luxuriously.

It was said that he had been born rich, but had been cheated out of his fortune by a guardian, yet little was known of his past other than that he hailed from the South somewhere and had stood number one in his class at West Point.

His pay did not, of course, support him in luxury, so it was known that he gambled and was a bold, extravagant, if not a reckless player.

He was said to be a sad flirt, too, for there was a magnetism about him that seemed to win women at once.

But his gambling, his orgies and flirtations were condoned, and he still lived on in popularity, until one night he went to the rescue of a wagon-train hemmed in by Snow Face the Renegade and his braves.

He gallantly made the rescue, but Captain Kennerley, the officer in command of the train, was mortally wounded, and intrusted to the young officer a large sum of Government money and five thousand dollars belonging to his niece, Kate Kennerley, an heiress, then at Fort Fairview.

The young officer became separated from his command, and returned to the fort after several days with the story that he had been robbed of the treasure by road-agents.

But he also stated that he had met Gambler Gaul, a noted sport of the border, who had paid to him a debt due him of five thousand dollars, and with this he liquidated a number of pressing debts due.

Then "Madam Rumor" set her tongue to wagging, and the "Idol of the Army" found himself suddenly accused of having hidden the money intrusted to his keeping, and dark stories were floating about against him.

So great was the pressure that he was court-martialed, but acquitted; but the verdict did not raise the cloud from about him.

He came out of that terrible ordeal a changed man, cutting those who had meant to cut him, his horses and his household effects were sold, except those actually needed, his valet and cook were dismissed, and his groom had to do treble duty, and his quarters were closed to all who had been his friends, with two exceptions, and they were Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Frank Powell.

His men and the people of the fort yet remained true as steel to him, and he ever had a salute and kind word for them, where his bow was freezing to his superiors and equals.

He shunned no one, devoted himself to his duty, and won the confidence and esteem of his commandant.

There were three others who were his friends, too, and these were Dunbar Dunton, the major of his regiment, and his beautiful young wife, and Kate Kennerley, the belle of the fort, and the very one whose money he had been accused of appropriating.

So it was that Fred Forrester, captain of the gallant —th Cavalry, became known as the "Outcast Officer," and bore all in stern silence, suffered uncomplainingly, and bided his time.

Still, appearances continued against him, for a boy bugler who had been with the rescued train, had been discovered to have formerly been known to the captain, and rumor had it that he had been forced to leave the fort under orders of Fred Forrester.

Believing in his innocence, both Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell had taken the trail to solve the mystery hanging over the young officer, and the solution came in Eagle Canyon, where Captain Brimstone and Snow Face, the Renegade, were hunted to death.

Then it became known from the lips of Edmund Allyn, *alias* Gambler Gaul and Captain Brimstone, that he was the step-brother of Fred

Forrester, had robbed him of his fortune, as his guardian, for he was much older, and yet, when they had met on the plains, had never been betrayed by him.

He confessed, too, how his men had robbed the young officer of the Government treasure and Miss Kennerley's money, and, in a fit of virtue, how he had kept the saddle-bags intact to restore to the one he had so wronged, and thus the sums had been returned to the paymaster at the fort and the heiress, and which act, which Forrester would not explain, had been misconstrued into the belief that he had had the treasure-bag hidden all the while, and brought it back only under pressure to remove the cloud upon him.

And so back to the fort went the Boys in Blue, under command of Captain Forrester, while Buffalo Bill went off alone to keep his pledge to the renegade chief.

The Boys in Blue escorted the rescued maiden, Kate Kennerley, and upon arrival at the fort the truth came out, the cloud was lifted, and Fred Forrester had won his triumph.

But another mystery enshrouded him, for, who was this "Boy Bugler" who had proved to have been a woman, masquerading as "Miss Meserole," the ally of Captain Brimstone to kidnap Kate Kennerley?

Who was "Miss Meserole," and what was she to Fred Forrester?

That mystery the young officer would not solve, so he yet remained "under a cloud."

CHAPTER V.

A WOMAN "CHIPS IN."

"HALT! Brakes on hard, and hands up!"

Rainbow Rob obeyed these commands, starting, terse and threatening, that rung out from the roadside, with the promptness of a soldier on parade.

Rainbow Rob was an old driver in the Rockies, and had, to use slang, "been thar before."

He knew just what such a command on the Overland coach trails meant, and if not promptly obeyed that a volley of bullets would follow, and he would be made the recipient of leaden souvenirs.

So he drew rein, put his foot hard on the brakes, and then held his hands over his head.

He had taken the box at the last station, the commencement of his run, which was a short one, but severe and perilous, and could only be driven by the most skillful hand with the ribbons.

He had six-in-hand—a splendid team, that knew their master as well as he knew them.

The last driver had told him that there were four men inside and a woman, and that was all the acquaintance he had with them.

One of those inside was a miner, another looked like a speculator from the East, a third was a Mexican, well-dressed but evil-faced, and the fourth "Judge" Jessup, the new landlord of "The Roost" in Gold Pocket City, whither the coach was bound.

The fifth passenger was a woman, wearing a long cloak, and veiled.

Rainbow Rob had won his cognomen on account of his hair, which was burnt red around the edges under his hat, was black on top, except where a tuft of snow-white hair grew on his forehead.

He was a powerful fellow, good-natured, feared nothing, and drove with a skill that no other man on the Overland could equal.

He gazed quickly at the toll-gatherers who had brought him to a halt.

As to recognizing them, it was impossible, for the two were at the heads of the leaders, and the man who stepped to the side of the coach wore a mask.

There were three outlaws in sight, but how many were not visible Rainbow Rob did not know, nor did he intend to discover by attempting to disobey the command.

The last driver had hinted that he thought he carried a rich party inside, and Rainbow Rob felt very sorry that they should come to grief upon his end of the line.

But then, what could he do about it?

"Rainbow, you have dust aboard to-day, and I want it," said the outlaw leader.

"Help yerself, if they is willing," was the surly response.

But, ere the man could make a step toward the coach the door flew open and a feminine form appeared, while sharply rung out the words:

"Gentlemen, I chip in here and call you! Hands up, pard, or I play my sixes for trumps!"

The outlaw leader and his men were so taken aback at the vision confronting them that they stood undecided and seemingly disconcerted.

It was a woman, and yet apparently scarcely more than eighteen.

She had a wealth of auburn hair, and eyes as black as jet, while every feature of her face was perfect.

Her form was slender, graceful and clad in a velvet dress of the Mexican pattern, slashed on the sides and trimmed with buttons and lace, and her head was surmounted by a sombrero, richly embroidered.

A strange, beautiful, picturesque creature she was, and one who "meant biz," as Rainbow Rob afterward remarked, for her "sixes," which she was to play as trumps, were in her hands, leveled and cocked.

"I've got him dead if he winks or if the other cattle raise a gun, so drive on, Rainbow Rob, or rush them down, as you think best."

And the woman held the leader covered as she spoke, while he dared not raise the weapons which he held in his hand, and his two followers would not move without their chief's orders.

CHAPTER VI.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

BUFFALO BILL had insisted upon terms with the Renegade Queen, for he had been going pretty steadily the past month, and had no desire for a running fight of a couple of days with red-skin pursuers.

If he could gain start enough to let darkness come on before his trail was taken, he felt that he had the night before him and need not dread pursuit.

So he had demanded the pledge from the Queen that he should have a good start.

Had she not given it, he would have done as he threatened, bound, gagged and left her so, and made his escape, for he knew if found there by warriors as her foe, he would have not the slightest chance for life.

So he made his terms, and she agreed to them, giving her pledge, yet also taking oath that she would hunt him down for having taken the life of her husband.

He left her, and the Indian outposts, regarding him as the Deserter Sergeant, the ally of their chief, allowed him to pass through the canyons without suspicion or hindrance.

The scout at once set off for the fort, and rode swiftly on until he came to a broad trail.

Into this he turned, and reaching a stream, he did not cross it, but followed the water-course for several miles, when darkness had fallen and he determined to camp until nearly dawn.

He was looking for a place to turn out of the stream when he caught sight of a firelight.

Instantly he drew rein and glanced earnestly in the direction of the light.

The murmur of the waters, here and there dashing over pebble-bed and among rocks, he knew had prevented the splash of his horse moving down the stream having been heard.

So he once more moved along, keeping well in the shadow of the trees upon the further shore of the shallow stream.

By the clear starlight he easily picked his way, but moved slowly, to let the waters drown the splash made by his horse.

The firelight grew larger, and he soon saw that it was built in an open space upon the bank of the stream.

A horse was staked out near the creek, and another stood close to the camp-fire, while some one was taking a pack-saddle from his back.

The scout regarded the scene most attentively for awhile and then said to himself:

"It is the Boy Bugler, Miss Meserole, or whatever he or she chooses to call herself or himself. I will pay him or her a visit in camp."

So saying he rode on past the camp, and leaving the stream staked his horse out about a hundred yards from the fire.

Then he moved on foot to the vicinity of the camp, and when the lonely camper-out returned to the fire from staking his pack-horse out, he suddenly confronted the tall form of the scout.

He had stepped out from the shadow of a tree directly into the firelight, and his form and face were distinctly revealed.

The Boy Bugler started and dropped his hand upon a revolver, while a startled cry broke from his lips.

He possessed a slender, graceful form, clad in uniform, with the insignia of a regimental bugler denoting the rank he had held.

Handsome he certainly was, and very attractive with his top-boots, spurs, uniform and fearless face, as beautiful as a woman's.

A minute he stood regarding the scout, his motion to draw his revolver checked by Buffalo Bill's calmly uttered words:

"Don't draw that weapon, or I shall break your arm with a bullet."

Then the lips of the bugler parted with a cry of joy, and the words followed as he sprung forward.

"Benson, my brother! do you not know me? I am Ruby, your sister!"

The scout started back, but quick as a flash, she had sprung toward him, thrown her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"I am not your brother," he said, in an embarrassed way, when he could collect himself sufficiently to speak.

"You do not know me, brother, in this dress, for I am not a boy, but a woman—your sister Ruby. I came West to seek you, and—But never mind now who else, for we will talk that over after a while; but why do you not speak?"

The scout was deeply moved. His face had paled and he seemed about to speak, and yet checked himself each time.

At last he said:

"I know you are not a youth, and that at

the fort you were known as Billie Blew, the Boy Bugler; but I am not Benson Roberts, as you believe."

"Great God! you are not he whom men call the Deserter Sergeant?" and the woman started back, in evident terror.

"No, I am not the Deserter Sergeant."

"Then you can be but one other."

"Who?"

"Buffalo Bill."

"I am Buffalo Bill, and not the Deserter Sergeant."

CHAPTER VII.

THE GRAVE BETWEEN THEM.

"You are, then, Buffalo Bill?" and the woman spoke with strange calmness, as she gazed fixedly into the face of the scout, upon whom the light of the camp-fire fell, revealing his features and form as distinctly as by daylight.

"I am, and you are not a youth, as all at the fort believed?"

"I confessed that when I told you I was your sister."

"I knew it before."

"Ah! and how?"

"I know you as the one who played the rôle of Miss Meserole."

"Ha! you know this?"

"I will tell you just what I do know of you, and see what you care to contradict."

"Pray do so," and there was a sneer in the tone in which she spoke, and her hand again dropped upon the butt of her revolver.

"Take your hand off that weapon, for though I will not kill you, being a woman, I will send a bullet through your arm if you attempt to draw it."

"If you know me, you will take my advice," and Buffalo Bill drew his revolver and held it in his hand, as though to carry out his threat.

"I do know you, as the quickest and deadliest shot on the border."

"I will not draw my revolver."

"I will not trust you, so unbuckle your belt and place it yonder, ten feet away."

"I will not."

"Obey me!"

"And thus give you the advantage?"

"I have it now and intend to keep it."

"I will not obey!"

"Let me tell you that I have just come from the Sioux village, and that there are warriors upon my trail, in large numbers."

"I wish to see you to a place of safety before I leave you, for, if you are on your way to an Overland station, as I believe, you are off your track and lost."

"I mean you no harm, but I am determined that you, in a fit of passion, shall not kill, or wound me."

"Will you obey?"

There was something in the calm, commanding manner of the scout that forced obedience, and the woman unbuckled her belt and placed it some distance off.

Then she returned and faced the scout, and said:

"I have yielded, so tell me what you know of me?"

"You are the sister of the man known as the Deserter Sergeant."

"I said as much."

"You came West, perhaps to see your brother, who was a fugitive from justice, but more from another motive."

"Name it."

"I do not know it; but, taking advantage of your skill as a cornet-player, you joined a westward-bound train and was promised by the captain in command a position as bugler."

"To that captain, Lucius Kennerley, you told stories about an army officer, poisoning him against him so that he did not longer regard him as a man of honor."

"To whom do you refer?"

"To Captain Fred Forrester, who rescued your train, saving all from massacre."

"You got a position at the fort as bugler of the—th Cavalry, and stories began to go the rounds against this same officer."

"You did not believe them?"

"No, I did not; nor did several others; but, Forrester became a social outcast from the charges made against him, and I believe you instigated all."

"Why?"

"I do not know, and it is none of my business, so I do not care; but he forced you to leave the fort, and you met, in some way, Brimstone, the road-agent, and allied yourself to him for pure devilry."

"In disguise, or, rather, in your own character, as a woman, only wearing a blonde wig, you returned to the fort as Miss Meserole and led Miss Kennerley into a trap."

"We rescued her several days ago, and you escaped and were allowed by Captain Forrester to go your way, only he sent a squad of soldiers to follow you that no harm should befall you."

"He was very kind," sneered the woman.

"Kinder than you deserved; but Captain Brimstone and his band were captured, the former was killed, and Miss Kennerley was rescued."

"I had captured Snow Face, the Renegade, and had him shot. I promised to give to his wife a letter, and I am just returning from that mission, while the others went on to the fort, and, finding you here, I see that you have in some way thrown the squad trailing you off the scent."

"Now let me tell you that you mistook me for your brother, as I am dressed in the very uniform he wore. You did not expect to find me here, while you knew me at the fort in a different character, and saw me at the canyon, before you fled, in my real person as a scout."

"That is true; but, tell me of my brother."

"Have you never heard that your brother was dead?"

"Yes; a rumor of that kind went about the fort, but I did not believe it."

"But were you not the spy in the Brimstone camp playing the part of my brother?"

"Yes."

"And my brother?"

"Is dead, in reality."

"Do you mean it?"

"I swear it."

"How do you know this?"

"As you have with you other clothes—for you changed from your riding habit and Miss Meserole after leaving the canyon—so have I disguises, and this one I wear, the horse I ride, the saddle, bridle and weapons, all belonged to your brother."

"And he?"

"Is dead, as I told you."

"May there not be some mistake?"

"None, for I saw him die."

"When and where?"

"Some months ago, and one night on the trail half a day's ride from here, where he laid in ambush for a man in the moonlight, but was not quick enough to kill him first."

"So met his death?"

"Yes."

"Who was this man?"

"A scout at Fort Fairview."

"His name?"

"It will do you no good to know."

"Oh, yes, it will."

"Why so?"

"For I shall avenge my brother."

"You better place as much space between yourself and this border as quickly as possible."

"I have work to do first, for I shall avenge my brother."

"He deserved his fate, and was killed openly by the man he sought to kill from an ambush."

"Are you the man who killed my brother?"

"As you force me to tell you, yes."

"Buffalo Bill, some day I will kill you—will avenge my brother, mark my words," and the disguised woman shook her clinched fist in the scout's face.

"A threatened man lives long, and I grow fat on threats," was the scout's indifferent reply, and then he added:

"Come! this is no place for you, and I will guide you to the nearest point for you to take the Overland coach East."

"If you remain here you will be killed by redskins."

"When you reach the station, which we can do by sunrise, I will return your belt of arms; but now you must go," and Buffalo Bill stepped forward, picked up the belt of arms, saddled the horses and led the way from the camp, the strange woman making no remonstrance, and obeying in perfect silence.

Not a word did she utter, through the night's long ride; nor until after the sun was an hour high did the scout halt.

Then he spoke:

"Do you see yonder cabin?"

"Yes."

"It is two miles from here and on the Overland."

"The agent bears the name of Tenderfoot Tom, and the East-bound coach will go by at noon."

"Good-by, and take my advice and keep away from the West."

"I thank you for your care of me, in bringing me here; but I am revengeful, Buffalo Bill, so shall keep my word," and calling to her pack-horse to follow, the woman rode on her way toward the cabin on the Overland, leaving the scout to go his way alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FORCED ALLY.

TENDERFOOT TOM had the confidence of the managers of the Overland Line.

He was faithful to his duties—they had always found him so at least—and he was brave as a lion.

In fact, his station was one of the few that the horse-thieves and outlaws dared not raid, as they knew he was always on the alert and not a man to trifle with.

His place was not easy of access, either, and he was a dead shot at long range as well as at short.

Tom was seated in front of his cabin, as was his habit, gazing out over the scenery before him, when he saw a horseman ride out of the timber, followed by a pack-horse.

"Who are he?" asked Tom, addressing the question to himself.

But he could not answer, so bided his time in patience, while the horseman came on toward the cabin.

The preparation which the station-man made to receive his visitor was simply to bring his rifle nearer his hand, just inside the door.

"He are in uniform, and do look like a youngster," muttered Tom, as the coming horseman neared the cabin, approaching slowly up the hill, his pack-horse trotting along behind him.

"Hello, Pard Buttons, hain't yer off yer trail?" called out Tom, as the rider drew rein a few paces from him.

"I think not, if this is an Overland stage station," was the reply.

"It is just what it be, young pard. Which way, and whar goin'?"

"From Fort Fairview, a bugler of the —th Regiment, on leave and bound East. Wish to know more?"

"I is allers a bit cur'us; but dismount and stake out ther critters, fer ther stage goes by at noon."

"I will go by it; but I wish to sell my cattle to you."

"We wants critters allers, and yours seems ter be fu'st-class; but I hain't no money."

"Give me an order on your boss at the other end of the line, and make it for just five hundred."

"Won't give it, for ther critters hain't wu'th more than four."

"I'll hand you fifty now for yourself, and throw in the saddle, pack-saddle, and bridles."

"Now, pard, you is talkin' sense, so I'll make it six hundred, call it three horses in ther order, and you give me a cool hundred now fer my generosity."

"All right, Tenderfoot Tom."

"How does yer know me?"

"I was told to make for Tenderfoot Tom's station, and I take it this is the place."

"Sure; but, what has yer got in that big pack?"

"A small tent, as you can see, blankets and furs for the people at home. You can have the tent and blankets."

"Thankee! But, we must have a rousin' good dinner, and I'll tell Rainbow Rob, who drives through to-day, to pass yer through as my pard."

"Does he drive from the fort?" quickly came the question.

"No, two stations this side. He's a new man, on this line, down from the Rockies."

"I see."

"What might be your name?"

"Roberts."

"I see; but I thought as how you might be a youngster I has heard of over at Fairview, as they calls Billie Blew, ther Boy Bugler."

"Yes, I know him well, of course."

"They do say as how he can play that fine as to make birds quit singin' when he begins; but, jist make yerself at home while I puts up ther critters, and then we'll write ther order fer ther money, and arter thet hev some grub."

This arrangement was carried out, and the stage came in sight just as dinner was finished.

Tenderfoot Tom said something to Rainbow Rob in a low tone, and the young stranger was invited to take a seat on the box with him, while his traps were hoisted to the top of the coach, which, at once, rolled away.

Tenderfoot felt in a good humor, for he was a clean hundred in pocket, besides some other things he had fallen heir to through the generosity of his young companion of an hour before.

So intent was he upon his meditations that he failed to notice a horseman coming up the trail toward the cabin until he was quite near to him.

Then he sprung to his feet and seized his rifle, but at once laid it aside with the remark:

"It's the Deserter Sergeant. It are lucky he didn't catch up with ther boy."

Then, as the horseman drew near, he called out:

"Hello, sergeant, whar from and what news?"

"Bad news, Tom," and the speaker dismounted, staked his horse out and took a seat by the tree, facing the station-man.

"Waal, I hopes nothin' hev gone ag'in' ther cap'n."

"It is just what has happened."

"The deuce! be he captered?"

"He is dead."

"Oh, Lord! when and whar?"

"Buffalo Bill led a party of Boys in Blue into the retreat at Eagle Canyon, and killed and captured the outfit."

"'Ceptin' you?"

"Yes; I got away."

"You was playin' in great luck; but did ther cap'n die suddint, or did he git religion, and in his last minutes give his pard away?"

"Captain Brimstone did not give you away, Tom; but how many more of the band of Brimstone Brotherhood are there besides you and me?"

"Thar is four or five more, I guesses, scatter-

ed about the mines; but you is ther only one knows I are a secret member, sergeant."

"Yes, now that the captain and several others in Eagle Canyon have passed in their chips, I am the only one that holds your secret, Tom. I followed a trail of two horses here; who war the riders?"

"A young horn-blower from the fort on leave, and going home, but he were a fool to come this far alone."

"He took the stage?"

"Yes."

"And his horses?"

"Sold 'em ter me fer ther comp'ny."

"They were good animals, and worth a hundred and fifty each."

Tenderfoot Tom laughed, and said:

"I called 'em three critters, and give an order for six hundred for 'em, seein' as how I got some traps and a hundred dollars myself; but what yer tells me of ther capt'in distresses me, sergeant, and I sees no way jist now of makin' more extra cash, unless you intends ter go it alone on ther trail, and we plays divvy for what news I gives yer."

"Tom, that is just what I want, and as a partnership is formed between us, let us trade belts of arms. Here is mine."

"Done! and we gets about equal, for mine is good, and yours hain't no slouch."

The belts were passed over, and then the Deserter Sergeant said:

"Now, Tenderfoot Tom, as you said, I alone know that you were secretly an ally of the Brimstone Brotherhood, and the compact between us is to be that you are my ally."

"I'm agreed, sergeant."

"Yes, you are to keep your place here, and report to me every movement of an outlaw and horse-thief, and you are to send your letters to me in a cipher I will give you, addressed to the fort."

"To the fort?"

"Yes, for I will be there, or near there. I am to know every suspicious character that goes through in the coach, and if you fail me, Tom, I will know it, for I shall entrap you if I can."

"I say, pard, I—"

"Now, Tom, I am not, as you suppose, the Deserter Sergeant, but one who will spare you and protect you if you serve me, as I wish, and send you to the end of a rope if you fail me."

"My dear Tom, I am Buffalo Bill! Hold! those weapons I exchanged with you are not loaded, but yours are!"

"Don't make me kill you with your own revolver, Tom."

"Durned ef I do, Buf'ler Bill; but I are ther deadeest beatedest man you ever seen, and I caves complete."

"You are wise; but, you understand me, and your position, so we will talk business," and the scout smiled, for he was master of the situation.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LADY SPORT.

THE situation on the Overland Trail, as detailed in Chapter V, when Rainbow Rob's coach was brought to a hold-up by masked road-agents, and in the minute of their success a woman suddenly sprung from the stage and "chipped in with her sixes" was a most thrilling one.

Those in the coach were as much startled by the act of the quiet passenger, for she had uttered no word to them, as were the road-agents and Rainbow Rob.

She was mistress of the situation, for in spite of being on guard and ready for an emergency, the fact that a woman had suddenly confronted him with deadly weapons, and assumed the offensive, completely nonplused the road-agent leader, and caught him so unawares that she covered his heart before he could level a revolver.

Besides, it seemed as though he hardly dared level at a woman, outlaw though he was.

So it was that the woman, or girl, who so suddenly and daringly "chipped in," changed the situation of affairs.

Rainbow Rob was a man to take quick advantage of anything that turned up in his favor.

The fact that no fire came from others in ambush, and no other outlaws appeared, revealed to him at a glance that there were no more than the three.

The leader of these was under cover of the girl's revolver, and the other two at the heads of the horses seemed struck spellbound.

"I've got him covered, Rainbow Rob, so drive on with your hearse and leave him to me," cried the girl.

Rainbow Rob half obeyed, for he suddenly raised his hand, a report followed, while the man at the head of the leader on the side of which stood the outlaw under cover of the girl's pistol, dropped in his tracks, and at the same time, the horses, startled by the shot, were swung round directly over the fellow on the other side.

He tried to escape but was knocked down and hurt severely, while the brake was put on and Rainbow Rob leaped to the ground just as the girl sung out:

"Hands up, Sir Outlaw, or die!"

The man obeyed with promptness, for he saw

that his situation was desperate, and knew that the trapper was trapped.

At the same time the others in the coach leaped out, and Rainbow Rob said dryly:

"No need o' yer services now, pards, fer ther stiff is pervided fer ther buryin' by this leddy."

"As fer you, pard, I'd like a look at yer face, and so will clip yer claws and then take a peep at yer countenance, which are a mean one, I'll bet high on it."

"Maybe it were better thet ther leddy send yer ter kingdom come, fer yer'll hang, sart'in, when ver reaches Gold Pocket City."

As Rob spoke he stepped up to the side of the outlaw, who stood with his hands elevated above his head, and at once disarmed him, after which he tore the mask from his face.

"As I thought, you is one o' ther Gold-Grabbers Gang; but I guesses you is about all is left of 'em."

"Pards, give a hand yender in puttin' thet gerloot on ther hearse, along with ther stiff I kilt, for it are my rule ter take all game home arter killin' it."

Thus appealed to, those from the coach raised the wounded outlaw, who had been knocked down by the leaders, and placed him in the stage, while the dead man was thrown on top.

"Pard, you git up thar, too," ordered Rob, to the outlaw leader, who stood silently in their midst.

He was a young man, reckless-faced, but really handsome.

His form was slight, but elegant. His dress was strangely neat for one whose life was spent on the road, and his hands and feet were small and shapely.

He wore his hair long, and it was dark brown and waving, while his face was covered with a dark beard some six inches in length.

He gazed with a strange interest upon the girl who had captured him, and seemed dazed rather than alarmed.

In obedience to the order of Rainbow Rob, he mounted the box, but was told to take a seat back on the coach, for the driver remarked:

"Keep a eye on yer dead pard, as a warnin' o' what yer own fate will be."

The young outlaw smiled, and it lit up his face with an expression that was almost womanly in its softness. This the woman sport seemed to notice, for she gazed at him with interest.

"I will ride on the box with you, if I may," she said, quietly.

"Now I'll be jist as tickled as though I'd run a tack in my heel to have you, miss. I wants your better acquaintance, for you is a dandy in petticoats and no mistake."

"You called me by name, a while since, so what might be your name?" asked the driver.

"Oh, I heard you called Rainbow Rob back at the station, and had heard of you before as the best driver on the Overland."

"My name is— Well, call me Bessie, and I am a lady sport," answered the girl, with a smile that fairly stunned Rob.

"Waal, Miss Bessie, I am proud ter meet yer, and yer'll be conferrin' a favor ter ride with me on ther box," declared the driver, who then bade the passengers reënter the coach.

Then, with the dead man on top, the prisoner seated near him and Bessie on the box by his side, Rob drove on his way.

Rainbow loved a pretty woman as much as he did a fine horse, and that was saying a great deal for him, so he tried to ingratiate himself into the favor of his fair companion with as much expedition as possible.

What so lovely a young woman was doing in the West alone he could not understand, but he meant that she should find in him a protector; so, as they rode along, he made himself so agreeable that he quite forgot his prisoner's existence or that there was a man slain by his hand within a few feet of him.

But the prisoner called himself to mind in a way that fairly startled even Rainbow Rob

CHAPTER X.

A LEAP FOR LIFE.

THE outlaw prisoner, whom Rainbow Rob had recognized as a man known in the mines as one of a band of gold-grabbers, had quietly remained upon the top of the coach, regarding his fair captor with a strange look on his face and listening to the conversation between her and the driver.

He had not been bound, as there was no rope at hand to tie him with; and then, Rainbow Rob had "clipped his claws," as he called disarming him, and therefore did not expect him to be dangerous.

"This is the most dangersome part o' ther road, miss, and a leetle bad drivin' right here would send us all in ther old hearse down to death," said Rainbow, as the coach suddenly turned around a cliff where a narrow shelf of rock formed the coach trail.

It wound around the cliff for a hundred yards, with a precipice on one side looking down into a foaming river sixty feet below.

If Rob had expected the young woman to be

appalled at the danger, he was mistaken, for she looked calmly down from her lofty perch and said, coolly:

"There is hardly more than two feet between the wheel-tracks and the precipice, so that a sudden swerve of the horses would throw us over."

"Yer is a cool one, miss, and— Oh, Lordy!"

The exclamation of Rob was at beholding the outlaw prisoner suddenly spring far out from the top of the stage-coach to descend into the foaming river below!

Instantly the driver threw his revolver forward to fire upon the descending form of the outlaw when it was struck up by the girl.

"For shame!" she cried; "let him escape, if he be not dashed to death, for his bold act deserves it."

"Yer is right, miss; he deserves to git away," said Rainbow Rob, whose revolver had gone off from the shock of the girl's blow, sending the bullet into the air.

For an instant of time the form of the outlaw seemed to hang poised in the air; then it shot downward, stiff, upright and like a flash, for the foaming river, sixty feet below.

There were rocks here and there in the stream, against which the waters surged furiously, and had the outlaw not calculated his place to strike, he would stand a good chance of being dashed to death when he struck.

Then, too, there might be a sunken rock which the waters concealed, upon which he might fall.

Again; did he strike a clear space, would he not sink so deep as to lose his strength ere he rose? To swim in that mad torrent would take a strong, bold swimmer, and one of great endurance as well.

The banks of the river were rocky and steep, and it would be some distance before he could find a landing-place.

These slim chances for escape flashed through the minds of both the woman sport and Rainbow Rob, as their eyes were riveted upon the descending form.

They saw the outlaw strike the waters, disappear beneath the flood, and it seemed like an age that they watched and waited for his reappearance.

At last, a hundred feet below, he rose and struck out boldly to guide himself down the swift-flowing flood, and a yell of admiration broke from the lips of Rainbow Rob at the thrilling sight.

"He'll git away, miss," he said.

"He swims superbly, and he deserves to escape," was the reply, and as the girl spoke, suddenly out of the coach window came the flash and report of revolvers.

In an instant the girl sport took in the situation; the men inside the coach were firing at the escaping man.

With a quickness that surprised Rob and won his admiration, the young woman swung herself down upon the box-step and thrust her revolver into the coach-window, while she cried:

"Cowards! Dare fire another shot at that man, outlaw though he be, and I will send a bullet into your hearts!"

The men in the coach shrunk back at her bold act and threatening words, while Rob called out:

"Bully for you, little leddy, and I backs yer up if yer does kill 'em, fer it are a coward act."

Rainbow Rob had seemed to forget his having fired upon the outlaw a moment before.

The girl swung herself back to her seat on the box, and as the coach rolled off of the dangerous rock-shelf to a place of safety, the brave swimmer was seen to reach a break in the bank where he could land, and in an instant he had drawn himself up out of danger.

Turning, he took off his dripping sombrero, waved it, and his clear voice rung out like a bugle:

"I owe you my life, miss, and I will not forget it!"

A moment after he disappeared, and the coach rolled rapidly on its way to Gold Pocket City.

"He are right, miss; yer did save him from my bullet, and I guesses from t'others, too; but we has one of 'em already grave-fruit, and t'other will be hanged when he are well enough, fer ther folks o' Gold Dust are mighty sudden in hangin' road-agents."

"Do you know aught about this man who escaped?"

"Waal, miss, he come to ther mines a year ago, holdin' papers fer some claims ter mines, and ther boys jist give him a warnin' ter leave under penalty o' hanging, for they doesn't want no paper claims out thar."

"He didn't scare wuth a cent, so they jist robbed him o' all he had, and set him on ther trail fer ther East afoot, and ther next we heard o' him he were holdin' up coaches on ther Overland."

"This were up toward ther Rockies, and he had a gang known as Gold-Grabbers; but I sees he hev come down this way ter work ther trails."

"Yer see, I hain't been long on this trail myself."

"Is yer goin' ter stay long in Gold Pocket, miss?"

"Yes, I am going to make it my home," was the reply.

"Lordy, miss, what on airth kin you do thar in Gold Pocket City? Yer'll wilt like a daisy in ther snow."

"No, I am not the kind of daisy that wilts," was the smiling rejoinder, and Rob judged by what he had just seen her do, that she was right.

"But what on airth will yer do thar, miss?"

"I'll gamble, for, did I not tell you that I was a lady sport," was the cool response of Rainbow's fair companion.

CHAPTER XI.

BOYS IN BUCKSKIN.

THE return of the Boys in Blue to Fort Fairview, with Miss Kennerley rescued, but without "Miss Meserole," created a sensation, which was only increased when the whole story was known of the rescue and what Buffalo Bill had accomplished.

Buffalo Bill had been given a special detail of soldiers, which he had formed of picked men, and had secretly sent out of the fort.

He had wisely decided that when he wished a force it was too far to get them from the fort, and so had camped his men in a canyon which he knew would be a safe retreat at all times.

Here they had waited while he was playing the Deserter Sergeant in the band of Captain Brimstone, spreading his net to entrap the outlaws, and also to insnare the cunning and cruel renegade chief, Snow Face.

While he was gone to the village of Snow Face, Captain Brimstone, as Parson Black, with the exiled Boy Bugler, went to the fort to kidnap Kate Kennerley, and secure thereby a large ransom.

Fortunately, Captain Fred Forrester had at once taken the trail of the kidnappers, come upon Buffalo Bill returning from the Sioux village, and comparing notes, the Boys in Blue were at once ordered out of their secret camp, and just in time to ambush Snow Face and a band of warriors who were pursuing the scout.

The attack of Captain Brimstone's band followed quickly on the destruction of Snow Face's Indians, and the rescue of Kate Kennerley and escape of Miss Meserole was the end of the trail.

Such was the story which was told at the fort, when Captain Forrester, Surgeon Powell and the gallant Secret-Service detachment of Boys in Blue returned.

But there was much anxiety felt for the scout, who had returned with his men.

They knew that he had gone to fulfill his pledge to Snow Face, to carry the letter written by the Renegade Chief to his wife.

They were aware that on his visit to the Indian village Snow Face had suspected him of being Buffalo Bill, and not the Deserter Sergeant, so had made him prisoner until he could find out.

The escape of the scout from him seemed to verify this; and, after having executed the chief, to venture again into the Indian village, though like the daring nature of the famous scout, looked like madness.

This cast a damper over all at the fort, and the joy of the return of Kate Kennerley was thus clouded.

As all who had heard the dying words of Captain Brimstone, knew that Fred Forrester was innocent of all charges made against him, it would be a silly person indeed to harp on the old story of his guilt, and so that had to be dropped.

But so prone are we to always believe ourselves right, that those who had been most bitter against Captain Forrester, felt assured that he was, if innocent of the other charge, at any rate a wicked man, leading a double life.

The one who had come to the fort as Billie Blew, and had been appointed a regimental bugler, proving to have been no boy at all, but a beautiful woman, certainly was linked in some way with Fred Forrester's past life all felt.

He had shown emotion one day when beholding the "Boy Bugler" the first time upon parade, had sent for him to visit his quarters, and the sequel was that the bugler left his regiment and went East with a wagon-train.

Fred Forrester's having gone alone after this train, held a private interview with the alleged Boy Bugler, returned and kept his own counsel, while the bugler left the train and, when supposed to have been killed by Indians, turned up at the fort as Miss Meserole, aided in the kidnapping of Kate Kennerley, whom the young captain was said to be deeply in love with, and then her escape, with her pack-horse and all, certainly looked very mysterious, and suspicious in the eyes of those who wished to make harm out of it, against the one who had so long been under a ban, and had been characterized as the "Officer Outcast."

And then some cruel mischief-makers among the officers and their families were determined to yet dethrone Fred Forrester.

If proven wrong in their accusations against

him regarding his having taken the money intrusted to him by Captain Kennerley, they must prove that he was guilty on some other charge.

Miss Kennerley told her story, of how charming a companion she had found Miss Meserole to be, and, but for the dying confession of Captain Brimstone, she never would have suspected her of being guilty of the crime laid at her door.

When asked what the mysterious woman could be to Captain Forrester, she replied that she did not know, nor was it her intention to question that officer upon a subject which he had not willingly explained.

In the midst of these rumors floating around Fred Forrester was as cool as an icicle and held the same reserve toward all which he had maintained before the charges were disproved against him by the confessions of a dying man.

That he had thus been proven guiltless did not, in his mind, palliate the suspicions of those who had believed him so, and his calm exterior could not be broken down by the fawning manner of a few who wished to curry favor with him.

They saw that he was a rising man, that nothing had been able to put him back thus far, and some day he might be able to make or mar the fortunes of aspiring officers.

As the days went by and Buffalo Bill did not return, Captain Forrester went to Colonel Cassidy, the commandant, and asked to go on a scout with a couple of companies after him.

The permission was given, and the troopers were preparing for the march, when Buffalo Bill rode quietly into the fort.

The appearance of horse and rider indicated that they had had a long and hard ride of it, and the men greeted the popular trailer with cheer after cheer.

He at once sought the quarters of the commandant, who gave him a warm welcome and chided him for the desperate chances he had taken.

"I went, Colonel Cassidy, to keep my pledge, and also to test the humor of the woman who will now rule the Sioux in the place of her dead husband, the renegade."

"You know that I have before twice met her. She is a very remarkable person, and I made this discovery—that she will be more cruel, more merciless even, than was the chief."

"She knows herself to be an outcast, and her idol was her husband and he is dead, so she vows vengeance and will have it if in her power."

"Then there are two other things to take into consideration—the first being that strange creature, known here as the Boy Bugler and Miss Meserole."

"I came upon her in camp, and saw her take the coach east from a station; but I believe she means more mischief, and I would not be surprised to see her back on the border at any time."

"The next cause for anxiety is the outlaws, for I learned from a station-agent, Tenderfoot Tom, who has reason to know about these matters, that other road-agents will be on the trails now, and you are aware that all of the Brimstone Brotherhood are not yet wiped out."

"Under these circumstances I am going to ask your permission to detail half a dozen scouts for fort service, and let me pick others among my trailers for a special band of Buckskin Boys, to aid me in the good work of running to earth these outlaws, and also to discover just what this Renegade Sioux Queen intends to do."

"I will make my headquarters in some secret retreat away from the fort, and report fully to you, and both Captain Forrester and Surgeon Frank Powell shall know my retreat in case you wish to communicate with me at any time; and I need not tell you that there are no better scouts under my command than these two officers."

"I can refuse you nothing, Cody, for you have done so well in all that you have undertaken. You and your Boys in Buckskin are at liberty to begin work whenever you deem best, for with you I fear trouble from this Renegade Queen, while that beautiful fiend, Miss Meserole, who so cleverly deceived us all, may intend more mischief, and it is well enough to know if she returns to the border."

Buffalo Bill thanked the colonel, and after some further conversation left for his own quarters, determined to depart within a few days upon the trail with his Buckskin Braves.

Just one week after his return he rode out of the fort, one night, with fourteen scouts in buckskin following him, and both Captain Forrester and Surgeon Powell went along in order to discover just where the retreat of the Buckskin Boys would be.

CHAPTER XII.

GOLD POCKET CITY.

THE mining-camp of "Gold Pocket City" was a very straggling affair, located in a valley through which a shallow, swift-flowing stream wound its way, and with hamlets scattered about for a distance of half a dozen miles.

The nature of the place had gotten for it the name of Gold Pocket, while the fact that it numbered nearly a thousand souls gained the additional name of "City."

The miners' cabins, several stores, a dozen or more drinking-saloons, with their never-failing attachments of gambling-hells, three alleged hotels and the Overland stage stables comprised the city, if I add to it a blacksmith-shop and a drug-store, kept by a quack doctor, for he was guiltless of diploma and rejoiced in the name of Doctor Squills, which the miners had changed to "Pills," to suit their own humor.

The Miners' Roost Hotel was the place of Gold Pocket, and with its annex known as the "Spirit Palace," and a gambling-hell called "Poker Hall," formed the most popular resort in the mines.

The Roost, with its annex saloon and gambling-hall, had come under the proprietorship of a new landlord, the former, with a great deal of wisdom, having sold out and gone East before he would find it impossible to do so.

The new landlord was, in Gold Pocket parlance, "a buttercup," whatever that might mean when applied to a man.

He was a stranger in town, and had the look of a preacher, dressed in black. He was never without an immaculate white shirt and tie, wore gold-rimmed spectacles and carried outside of his tightly-buttoned frock coat a belt containing a trio of revolvers.

Where he had come from no one knew, but he had arrived on the coach one morning, killed a man who called himself a sky pirate before breakfast, bought the former landlord of the Roost out before dinner, paying cash for his bargain, and no mean man at that, and before supper had the following announcement posted upon the doors of the hotel, the saloon and gambling-hall:

"TAKE GOOD NOTICE

that I have bought out this Hash Factory, with all appurtenances, and intend to run it according to my own views of how a hotel, saloon and gambling-den should be run.

"If any one offers me advice unasked, let him do it with his pistol ready for work, for I shall stand no meddling, nor will I allow my premises to be turned into a bear-garden.

"All are welcome and invited to free meals, whisky and cigars on the Holy Sabbath next, so come along so that you can get acquainted with the new landlord.

Yours truly,

BONIFACE BILL."

The miners read this over and over again, and at first some decided to take exceptions to it; but more mature deliberation convinced them that Boniface Bill, which they at once abbreviated to "Bonyface," and "Bony," had a right to run his hotel to suit himself, and he certainly had shown much generosity in inviting all to dine, drink and smoke with him on Sunday.

He had also shown, by his killing a man before he had been ten minutes in the Gold Pocket, for insulting him, that he was a "man of business," and was not to be trifled with.

So the new landlord took control, and a host of workmen were put upon the place to clean up and get all in readiness for opening-day, which was to be a "go-as-you-please" occasion.

Then a rumor went around that Boniface Bill was preparing for other lodgers, for some one had discovered him in Gold Pocket burying-ground—which rejoiced in the name of "Welcome Home Cemetery"—laying out a private lot for his own dead, seemingly.

He had already buried the man he had shot there, giving him the post of honor as Number One.

On the head-board of this unfortunate was the following graphic inscription:

"IN HONOR

of

"MY ARRIVAL IN GOLD POCKET CITY,

"I erect this board to the memory of

"DAN DICKENS, ALIAS DONKEY DAN,

"whose life I took for reasons which I hope my friends will ponder over.

"BONIFACE BILL,

"Landlord of The Roost,

the best Hash House west of the Missouri River, and with saloon and card-hall attached."

Before the close of the following day every miner in Gold Pocket had made his pilgrimage to the Welcome Home Cemetery, to read the inscription on the head-board to Donkey Dan's memory, and so when Sunday came round they all felt that they were pretty well acquainted with the new landlord of The Roost.

The doors were thrown open early on Sunday morning, and an eye-opener given to all, after which breakfast was served, and a fine breakfast it was.

Drinking and gambling followed until dinner, when a feast was spread that raised a howl of delight, and the meal passed off without other disturbance than the throwing out of the window, by the landlord, of an unruly guest, who sent Doctor Pills out to set his broken bones, or prepare him for burial, as the case might be, and send the bill to him.

Supper was also served free, and when The Roost closed its doors that night, to recuperate after the day's hard work, Landlord Boniface was voted unanimously a "Gent from Way-

back," and the popularity of the place under its new management was assured.

It was some two months after this opening that Rainbow Rob drove up to the door of The Roost with the Lady Sport seated on the box by his side, a dead body on the top of his coach, and a much worried outlaw in the vehicle with the passengers.

Rainbow Rob threw his reins upon the backs of his wheelers, which the stable boys already had in hand, and, dismounting, turned to aid his fair companion to alight, when, with a graceful spring, she leaped over his head and ran up the steps to the hotel.

A yell of admiration greeted her act, and the landlord, ignoring the male passengers, hastened to the office to greet her, followed by the driver.

"Who is she, Rob?" asked Landlord Boniface Bill, with interest.

"I pass, more than to say she are a daisy, and calls herself a Lady Sport.

"I'll interdooce yer, pard."

And leading the landlord up to the fair passenger, who stood by the office-desk, Rob said:

"Miss Bessie, this are Landlord Boniface Bill, o' Ther Roost, and he are a square man from toe ter top-knot.

"Bony, this are Miss Bessie, ther Lady Sport, and she jist are a terror in petticoats, as yer'll know when I tells yer what she have did."

"I am glad to meet you, Landlord Boniface, and I am here to stay, so I wish your best room, and you'll find my baggage in the coach. Shall I register?"

For once Boniface Bill seemed to be taken aback.

The beautiful eyes of the woman were upon him; his face flushed, and in an embarrassed way he turned the hotel register around for her to write therein her name.

In a bold hand she wrote it:

"BOWIE-KNIFE BESSIE,

"The Lady Sport."

Then Rainbow Rob went off with the landlord to tell his story, and from that minute the Lady Sport became a beautiful mystery in Gold Pocket City and the idol of the miners.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON A WOMAN'S TRAIL.

DRIPPING, panting, and barely able to clamber up the steep, rocky bank, after his desperate struggle with the foaming waters for life, the outlaw who had dared make such a bold effort to escape, dropped down to rest, while the coach rolled on, leaving him a free man.

He had been perfectly cool while a prisoner, and seemingly knowing that sure death at the end of a rope awaited him at Gold Pocket, he had boldly made the leap for life.

He knew the place, so was fully aware of all its desperate peril.

His eyes coolly took in the situation, marked the torrent, its rocks and its pools.

It would take a bold and strong swimmer to keep up there in that whirlpool of waters, but he would risk it.

His eyes turned quickly upon the face of the strange woman who had sought that far land, who had been his captor, and a moment they lingered there.

Then he set his lips, nerved himself to his work, and selected the spot when he meant to alight in the waters.

If a rock lay sunken beneath, his death was assured; but he must take the chances.

Another quick glance, as though for hope, for courage, upon the woman, and he made the spring.

The reader knows its success.

His face, as he went downward, was turned upon the woman, and even in that awful moment of appalling suspense he saw her strike up the revolver leveled at him by Rainbow Rob.

Then he struck the waters and sunk down, down, until he felt that he was going downward to Perdition.

But he arose at last and began the struggle; and glancing upward he beheld, amid the mist of waters, the form of the woman swing around from the box and level her revolver at those in the coach who were firing at him.

He saw no more, but struggled on, reached the bank and was saved.

For a long while he lay there to rest, and his thoughts were busy.

"Who is she? What is she?" he mused. "She euchered me in the moment of success, for I had the very men whom I sought in that coach.

"I must try again.

"But, I must know that woman and all about her. Dick is dead, and Carl is hurt and in the hands of the Philistines, so I am alone except for Chinnee at the camp.

"I must give up the road, at least for awhile, and go to the camps.

"I think I can disguise myself so as not to be known, and I must follow on the trail of that woman sport.

"Yes, I must know all about her, for, somehow, she has fascinated me. Her hand would have hanged me, and yet she saved me from the bullet of Rainbow Rob, for he never misses, and

had he done so, those cowards in the coach would have killed me.

"Now to go to my camp."

He arose and walked along the bank for a mile or more.

Then he came to where he could cross the river and springing in swam to the other shore.

Taking a course that led him into the Overland stage-trail, after a walk of a couple of miles, he followed it back to the scene of the tragedy, and which had so nearly been fatal to him.

He stood a moment upon the spot, as though recalling all that had passed there, and, as he turned to go, his eyes fell upon what caused him to start, utter an exclamation of surprise and spring toward an object lying in the trail.

It was a leather wallet, encircled by a rubber strap, and apparently well filled.

Eagerly he opened it, and beheld papers therein and a large sum in bank-notes, all of large denomination.

"Great Scott! I have struck a fortune after all! Now I am myself again, and I take that woman's trail."

Eagerly he glanced over one and all of the contents of the large Russia-leather wallet, and his face was flushed with excitement the while.

Then he thrust it away in an inner pocket, and walked on up into the timber.

Several hundred yards away he came upon three horses hitched in a thicket and saddled and bridled ready for the road.

They were just as the trio of outlaws had left them when they went to hold up Ribbon Rob's coach.

"You two go back riderless, for your master is dead, and yours goes on to Gold Pocket to hang.

"And you, too, very nearly went riderless, old horse," he said, addressing the three animals.

Unfastening the stake-rope of the two, he mounted his own horse and led the others back through the timber.

He rode slowly, and as though in deep thought, and at last came in sight of a small canyon in which was a camp that was evidently only temporary.

Several horses were staked out near, and near a camp-fire knelt a form cutting up a deer.

The man ran as he heard hoof-falls, displaying the form of a giant Chinnee, for he was all of six feet four inches in height, broad-shouldered and of athletic build.

He was dressed in buckskin, even to his moccasins, and wore a slouch hat on his head, the rim of which had painted upon it a number of Chinese letters.

If he was armed, save a rifle that stood near, the weapons were not visible about his person.

"Bossee backee allee lightee," he said, with a smile, as the outlaw rode up and threw himself from his horse.

"Yes, Chinnee, the boss is back all right; but he has had the closest shave of his life, and Carl is a prisoner and Dick is dead."

"The degee! habee muchee hard time?"

"Yes, very!"

"Dickee dead?"

"Carlee hangee?"

"Not yet, but he soon will be."

"Bossee allee lightee?"

"Yes."

"Chinee allee lightee?"

"Yes."

"Keepee allee lightee, you bettee!"

"I hope so, Chinnee; but we'll have supper and then light out for our Overland station, where we can sell the horses and then take the coach for Gold Pocket."

"To see Carlee hang up?"

"No, for I guess they won't delay in that little attention to him; but you will go with me, Chinnee?"

"To degee, if bossee wantee," was the prompt and decided rejoinder.

"No, I don't wish to go to the devil; but we'll stick together as pards, and we'll make money, too, Chinnee."

"You bettee! Bossee no foollee, and Chinaman habee muchee heap sense, you bettee!" and the Chinaman proceeded to prepare supper, while the outlaw whom he had addressed as boss, and seemed so anxious to cling to as a pard, went to a pack-saddle to get some dry clothing.

The next morning, armed and equipped once more, and with half a dozen led horses, one of them bearing a pack, the outlaw and Chinnee set out for a station on the Overland, the white man determined to carry out his threat to find the woman who had crossed his path so strangely.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RED TRAILER.

A NUMBER of men were encamped in a thick growth of timber that fringed the top of a ridge jutting out from a range of mountains into a plain.

Here and there the trail was broken by a stream, a timber motte, or a rise of land, but the view across was a fine one and extended for miles.

The men encamped there were evidently there

to stay, for they had built wicky-ups, which afforded them good shelter in case of rain, and in a ravine near wood was piled up for camp-fires, while scattered about, as though lately in use, were cooking-utensils, buckets of water, and several pack-baskets of salt, pepper, coffee and sugar.

Further down, the ravine spread out in a valley, and here were horses staked out, a score in number, with their saddles and bridles placed by each lariat-pin, ready for instant use.

And down this valley was the only means of getting away from the camp on the summit of the ridge.

To one riding along at the base of the ridge there would be no suspicion of a camp on the ridge, or near, and the trail down the valley led directly into a lake which stretched from hill to hill.

On the other side there were numerous trails of buffalo, deer, wolves, bear and horses that made the mountain-lake a drinking-place, and it would have been a clever trailer to suspect that a trail of horsemen led across the lake and up to the ridge.

Coming up the trail to the lake were two horsemen, who boldly rode into the water, and their horses waded toward a wood-covered island not a hundred feet away. There the two riders dismounted and took from among the bushes a canvas boat, which could be folded up when not in use. There were two paddles in it.

The horsemen lifted the saddles and bridles and put them in the boat; then they got in themselves, and while one paddled the other led the horses on either side of the little craft.

The water deepened rapidly, and soon the horses were swimming, the boat keeping its lead.

It was a long swim, but the good steeds were equal to it, and a landing was made upon the upper shore of the mountain basin. One of the men then resaddled the animals, while the other, taking another boat of like kind from among the bushes, towed it back to the island and left it there.

Had he suspected a trailer on their path he would have taken notice of what happened to be a piece of bark floating upon the waters; and, had he paddled toward it he would have discovered the face of an Indian!

This red-skin had, in truth, been following the two horsemen, and was boldly swimming across the lake, but, seeing the boat returning, he took to floating to avoid detection.

The man in the boat paddled back to the island, rehid the little craft he had in tow, and without observing the face of the floating Indian, returned to the upper end of the basin.

The Indian waited until the rower was far away on the waters, and then boldly swam after him.

He reached the spot where the boat landed and soon slipped away in the fringe of trees on one side of the valley.

An hour after he again appeared, entered the lake, swam to the lower shore and darted off down the foot-hills like a deer.

It was very evident that he had made what he deemed to be an important discovery.

In the mean time the man with the two horses had gone up the valley until it narrowed into a canyon, and ended in the rocky ravine at the summit of the ridge.

A dozen men were in the camp, and all greeted him pleasantly, as he appeared, as though he had been absent several days.

"Chief here, Bird?" he asked of one.

"Yes, up at his wicky-up. Any news, Jack?"

"Some little," was the reply, and he passed on.

The man was dressed in buckskin, as were the others in the camp, and as also had been his companion who returned with the boat.

The horses, all splendid animals, were staked in the valley below. Their saddles and bridles were of the finest Mexican make and bespangled with silver coin.

A magnificent lot of men they were, too, with long hair, bearded faces, bronzed complexions, and the forms of athletes every one of them.

The one who now sought the chief was something of a dandy in dress, for his buckskin leggings and hunting-shirt were beaded and fringed; he wore a gray silk shirt, while his sombrero was looped up over the left ear with a gold star of five points, and a chain of gold links encircled it.

His form was slightly over the medium height, and a model of symmetry, while his build was muscular in the extreme.

A slight mustache shaded his mouth, yet did not hide even rows of snow-white teeth, which were well displayed when he smiled, and his smile was most winning.

He wore a belt of arms, had a rifle swung at his back, and his leggings were tucked into the tops of cavalry boots.

The man was a handsome specimen of the true plainsman, a hero in buckskin, and one who won fame as Texas Jack, but who, when born in a Virginia village was given the name of John B. Omohundro.

"Hello, Jack, back again?" said a man rising from a *serape*, where he had been lying at full length, and he added:

"I begun to feel anxious about you, pard."

"I am back, Bill, and I have news to tell," was the reply, and the two, Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack, sat down for a council-of-war, for the Texan trailer had brought very important tidings to the chief of the Buckskin Braves.

CHAPTER XV.

BOWIE-KNIFE BESSIE.

THE arrival of the beautiful stranger at Gold Pocket created a sensation in the mines, and especially as it became known that she had written herself down as "Lady Sport."

Most of the females who had come to Gold Pocket had arrived under protection of its citizens, or at least most of them had.

Some were deserted wives in search of their truant husbands; others were daughters in search of a father, or sister looking up a lost brother, with now and then a sweetheart making bold to trace up a fickle lover.

Most of the wives who had caught or found husbands remained; some of the daughters would give up the chase and take a husband instead of a father, and the sweetheart would be certain to be consoled for her lover by some handsome young miner in Gold Pocket City.

Thus it had come to pass, in the second year of the existence of Gold Pocket, a score or more of females had become dwellers there.

That one had arrived, however, who did not come in search of some "horrid man," but had come as a sport, created an excitement in the Pocket which the death of half a dozen of its best citizens "with their boots on" would not have occasioned.

Gold Pocket was jogging along in the even, or uneven tenor, as the case might be, of its way, with Boniface Bill a most popular landlord, and becoming more so every day.

The gold leads were panning out satisfactorily, if not most generously; money was plenty, business good, and gambling the order of the night.

The Roost was better kept than ever before. Poker Hall had been enlarged and fitted up, the Spirit Palace had departed from the old-time custom of selling "whisky straight" only, and now dispensed "mixed drinks," while the liquors were considered above par in quality; but, if not so in reality, Landlord Bony wisely kept the secret to himself, and if he had occasion to discharge any of his bartenders, he was morally certain he would not tell on him, as he would see that he left town by way of Welcome Home Cemetery, and, I may add just here, that the landlord had added to his list of victims two gentlemen, who, as the unanimous verdict was, had met a just fate for not knowing that the host of The Roost was always "loaded."

Bony, however, buried them at his own expense, and the inscriptions to their memory were as thoroughly to the point as the one on the head-board over the grave of Donkey Dan.

When the news spread that a Lady Sport had arrived in the Pocket, the boys were excited, as I have said, and the more so when it became noised about that she could not be over eighteen years of age, was beautiful in face and form, dressed gorgeously in Mexican costume, wore diamonds to dazzle the eyes, and went armed to the teeth.

Landlord Bony gave the fair guest a cottage to herself, perched upon a spur above the hotel proper, and which had been fitted up and occupied by Gambler Gaul, a man who had held high carnival in Gold Pocket as a card-player, but, disappearing suddenly, had turned out to be none other than Captain Brimstone, the road-agent.

The Lady Sport expressed herself delighted with her quarters, and unpacked her traps with the air of one who had come to stay.

What she brought with her made her rooms, for she had two in her cabin, look most home-like, and when she appeared in the supper-room the miners just held their breath.

Beautiful she certainly did look, while her costume was exquisite.

And yet it was marred by her belt of arms.

It was a belt, yet encircled by sash of gold thread, and the trimmings of her Mexican costume were of gold embroidery, lace and bell buttons, the last giving a musical jingle at every movement of her body.

She wore her sombrero, with its fringe of gold coins and cord of gold, while a pin held up the loop, representing a bowie-knife, with gold blade, the hilt studded with rubies.

In her belt were a pair of gold-mounted revolvers, one on each hip, while on either side were a pair of bowie-knives, bright-bladed and sharp.

After supper, Landlord Bony led his guest into Poker Hall, just as a row had unfortunately begun, for a huge bully, a desperado feared by all, had decided upon a victim in his drunken fury, and that victim was a mere boy, who cowered trembling before him.

"You is a durned fool ter come ter these parts, so I is goin' ter send yer out o' em durned quick," roared the desperado, just as the Lady Sport entered the room.

With his words, he threw his revolver forward to fire, when, quick as a flash, the Lady

Sport, slipping a bowie-knife from her belt, hurled it with such true aim that it stuck quivering in the arm of the desperado!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BUCKSKIN BRAVES AT HOME.

As the reader has doubtless surmised, the camp on the ridge, which the scout Texas Jack and his comrade entered by crossing the lake, was that of the Buckskin Braves, the special detail of frontiersmen under the command of Buffalo Bill.

In the time that they had been away from the fort, much had been done as the foundation for future work, though on the surface nothing had yet made display.

The chief of scouts had made a circuit of the country he had to operate in, and had acquainted his men with the location of the Sioux village and the separate trails leading thereto.

He had under him picked men, scouts who were equal to the red-skins as trailers, and who were also able to "out-Injun them" in cunning.

For pluck, Buffalo Bill would put his Braves in Buckskin against the world, while they were all of them superb horsemen, dead shots, and possessed endurance to stand every hardship and fatigue.

He had been working also to find the hiding-places of horse-thieves who infested the border, and discover if the rumor was true that the Gold Grabbers of the Rocky Mountains, driven from their scenes of outlawry, were determined to make the vicinity of Fort Fairview their base of operations, notwithstanding the summary fate of the Brimstone Brotherhood.

Knowing that there were yet half a dozen or more of this same Brotherhood at large, Buffalo Bill did not doubt but that they would be glad to unite themselves with any new band of outlaws who might come that way, not only from feelings of revenge against himself and the soldiers, but also for the sake of plunder.

With well-to-do settlers scattered here and there, a few thinly-garrisoned forts, the mines panning out well, and trains and coaches running regularly east and west, there were chances for the road-agents to make rich hauls.

So, as he had done with the Boys in Blue, the chief of scouts wished to have his Buckskin Braves on the field, where he could get at them when needed, and where their presence would be unsuspected.

Acquainted most thoroughly with the country, Buffalo Bill knew scores of hiding-places, which he was ever on the watch for, and with a glass one day, from the distant range of mountains, had discovered the canyon above the lake and sought it out for his own convenience.

And thither he had taken his Braves in Buckskin, for well he knew any tracks he might leave would soon be obliterated by buffalo, deer and elk coming there to drink.

He had prepared for crossing the lake by bringing from the fort two canvas boats that closed up like an accordeon and could be carried on a pack-saddle, with braces to stretch it out when needed for use.

And thus far his retreat was known to but two persons outside of the command of fourteen scouts he had with him.

Those two were Surgeon Frank Powell and Captain Fred Forrester, who had accompanied the scouts to their retreat.

Both of these officers were noted as scouts, and they were trusted as such on a trail as thoroughly as was any man in buckskin on the border.

Going with the chief of scouts and his men, they knew just how to reach the secret camp, and Buffalo Bill told them that one boat was always kept hidden in the thicket on the little island and another at the camp end of the lake.

The island was hardly half an acre in size, and with deep water all around it, yet had a bar running out to it from the shore on which the depth was not over three feet, so that a horseman could ride thus far and keep dry.

The bar was narrow, and the animals seeking water there were never tempted to visit the island, while a pale-face or red-skin saw no motive for doing so, as he expected of course to have to swim there.

Beyond the island from where the canvas boat lay the lake was many feet deep.

In breadth it was from half a mile to a quarter, with steep valley sides for banks, and thus could not be flanked, as towering cliffs arose on either side.

In length the lake was nearly two miles and winding, narrowing to a pass at the upper end, where the fertile valley began.

This valley was rich in grass and would herd hundreds of cattle, so that the horses of the scouts found ample food there.

Beyond was the rugged canyon, ending in the ravine, with the timber-clad plateau, on top of the ridge above.

Here were the brush shelters of the scouts, with the one thrown up for the chief slightly apart.

It was well made, and dry even in a rain-storm.

A shelter of brush was over the front to keep off rain and sunshine, and here the chief had a

mossy bank on which to throw his *serape* for rest on the long afternoons.

By moving his position a few feet he could see out over the foot-hills and plains for miles, and he had so placed boughs of trees that those on the ridge could not be seen from the lowlands, nor their presence there suspected.

It was natural, then, for all to feel no dread of their retreat being discovered, and Texas Jack, who had been sent off on a special scout toward the Sioux village, with one companion, had no idea that he had been tracked by a cunning red-skin chief, tracked to the shore of the lake, and then even trailed across the water, up the valley, and almost to the very camp of the Braves in Buckskin.

In truth the red-skin scout had gotten to a position where he could see the scout's camp, and counting the horses in the valley, he had come to the conclusion that there were a score of men in the encampment; but he had counted the pack-animals as well, so got five more than there really were.

And back he went with his story, while Texas Jack had his story to tell of a discovery he had made, and both the scout's and the red-skin chief's stories were of much importance, as the reader will discover.

Between the chief of scouts and his men there always existed a friendship as well as the position between an officer and those under him.

Buffalo Bill put on no airs; he was not spoiled by the fame he had won, nor by praise.

He knew well his power, his capabilities, and he gauged his men's accordingly.

Texas Jack was his most intimate companion among the scouts, as was Surgeon Frank Powell among the officers; but he had unbounded regard for, and faith in Captain Fred Forrester, and had ever believed him true as steel and a man to tie to in time of need.

He owed his life to Texas Jack a dozen times over, as the Texan did to him, and hence the two were like brothers.

"Eat something, Jack, for you look used up, and take your time in telling your story," he said kindly when the Texan told him he had important news for him, and the tried and hungry man obeyed, knowing that his chief had the patience of an Indian.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STRANGE DUEL.

In a heavy piece of timber, with a ridge in the background, a river in front, was a picturesque encampment.

There were fully two hundred warriors, and their ponies were staked out around the base of the ridge, where the grass grew luxuriantly, and their trappings lay by their stake-pins.

The horses were of the class known as Indian ponies, and they were a fine lot of wiry, fleet-footed animals that showed good care from their riders, and no signs of having been on the trail for several days.

The riders were in their full rig and war-paint, and a splendid lot of muscular young braves, some of whom appeared to be so youthful they were doubtless upon their first war-path of importance.

These were lolling lazily about under the trees, cleaning their weapons, asleep or conversing in groups in low tone, for no loud sound broke the stillness, and one would hardly have believed that two hundred human beings could be as quiet.

Apart from the main force was a group of four Indians, whose feather headdresses at once stamped them as chiefs.

Two of these were along in years, men who had seen half a century of life, perhaps had passed the three-score mile-stone.

Their faces were stern and their lips were closed, while the two younger were talking calmly together, their voices low and hardly heard twenty feet away.

Some fifty yards distant was what appeared to be a *serape* tent, in the shape of the letter A.

The sides were gayly striped, and around it was a fence of the boughs of trees lately cut.

Within this inclosure, pacing to and fro, her brow clouded, her face pale and stern, was the Renegade Queen, who was known now among her red-skin subjects as Cruel Face.

Yet she was very beautiful, and her Indian costume was a grandly gorgeous one, with its beads and embroidery, its necklaces and amulets of beaten gold, and the head-dress of gay feathers.

The face of Irma Dean, the widow of the renegade chief, showed that she had suffered. There seemed to rest in her face a constant look of sadness, mingled with bitterness.

It was resignation, yet for a purpose.

She had feigned to be dead to all her friends, to follow a fugitive from the gallows into Western wilds.

She had idolized him, made him her hero, her religion, and he had been, by the dying confession of the man who had wronged him so cruelly, proven guiltless.

Then he had been slain, had been executed by order of Buffalo Bill, as a renegade, when false charges had made him so.

He had been put to death for crimes which an imbibed nature had alone caused him to commit, and she had vowed to be avenged for his death.

He could not live among his own race, for they had sought to hang him, though innocent, and hence he had found a refuge among savages.

Like them he had been cruel, and hunted down, and the man who had brought him to his death she meant to also slay.

Now she had started upon the trail, for what was she more than the people she ruled?

When the death of Snow Face became known, she had shown the master spirit that forced the strongest braves to acknowledge her as the ruling spirit.

She would tolerate no interference, and old Red Tomahawk, the great medicine-chief of the tribe, was her friend, and urged her claims.

So all yielded, all but one, a chief who hated a squaw as he did a pale-face, and who began to foment trouble for the beautiful white renegade.

She was told of his actions, and mounting her horse at once rode to his tepee.

All eyes were upon her, and she called the insurgent chief to speak to her.

He came with savage face and wicked eye.

"The Deadly Hand is my foe—is it not so?" she asked, calmly.

"The Deadly Hand hates a squaw, for they are poison in the heart of a great warrior—they make boys of braves," was the reply.

"Then the Deadly Hand refuses to obey the Cruel Face because she is a squaw, a pale-face squaw?"

"She is a woman, and so a fool. She will lead the Sioux only to death—squaws have the hearts of deers, braves have the hearts of mountain-lions."

"Then let the Deadly Hand mount his horse and wait here until the Cruel Face rides to yonder tree. Then she will turn and ride toward the Deadly Hand, and kill him; so let him protect himself."

"The Cruel Face speaks like a child; the Deadly Hand is a great chief," was the contemptuous reply.

"Then let him show his courage, for if he does not kill the Cruel Face she will kill him."

"He has heard, so let him be ready."

With this, the woman turned her horse and rode slowly away toward the tree she had pointed out and which was three hundred yards distant from the tepee of the chief.

On either side were the tepees of the tribe, or rather village over which Deadly Hand held sway, for there were half a dozen villages in the tribe under the rule of the Renegade Queen.

The news spread rapidly, and all was wonder and excitement and hundreds gathered closer to see the duel.

Deadly Hand was furious, for he had had the gauntlet flung in his face by a woman.

He had meant to kill her when he led his braves to rebellion, and now he was determined to do so and sprung back into his tepee for his weapons, which consisted of a spear, bow and arrows, a cavalry carbine and an old-fashioned revolver.

He called to a brave to bring his horse, and when the Queen had turned around the tree he was ready to mount.

She had no rifle, only her revolvers, but he knew well that she was a dead-shot.

Once faced toward the tepee of the chief, the Queen rode on at a gallop and the Indians sprung into his saddle.

Then a score of warriors rode forward and headed off Cruel Face, begging her to let any one of them fight the savage chief in her stead.

But she waved them sternly back and held on her way, her horse increasing his speed as he neared the tepee of Deadly Hand, who now rode toward her.

Suddenly, when about a hundred yards only divided them, the chief halted and threw his rifle to his shoulder.

His horse stood like a statue, and a hush was upon all.

At the act the Renegade Queen did not flinch, or check her speed, nor did she raise the revolver she carried in her right hand.

With the puff of smoke from the rifle the head of her mustang was jerked upward, and the bullet, sent true, buried itself in the forehead of the animal.

Down dropped the mustang, but the agile woman, unhurt, lighted upon her feet and ran swiftly toward the chief.

He threw aside his carbine and brought his bow and arrows into use, but was not quick enough, for halting suddenly, up went the revolver in the Renegade Queen's hand, and rapidly the shots rung out.

A wild war-cry, a snort of pain and fright, and Deadly Hand and his horse fell.

Advancing rapidly, the merciless woman emptied her revolver into the writhing form of the insurgent chief, and became with his death the undisputed ruler of the tribe.

And now we find her, with two hundred braves at her back, on the war-path, determined to keep her vow against Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE GRAVE OF AN IDOL.

A MURMUR ran through the Indian camp in the timber, and all eyes were turned toward a point where a horseman appeared.

It was a chief, and his pony seemed to have been hard-ridden.

He came on toward the spot where the Renegade Queen had her camp, and dismounting, advanced toward her.

"The Red Eagle is welcome, and he has something to tell me?" she said, her dark eyes fixed upon the fine face of the young chief, for he was under thirty, and a splendid specimen of savage manhood.

"The Red Eagle has news for the Cruel Face."

"She sent him to find the grave of the mighty Snow Face, and he has done so."

The woman's face flushed with seeming pleasure, and she held out her hand and grasped that of the young chief, who seemed pleased at the act.

"The Red Eagle is a great chief, and the Cruel Face will not forget him."

"The grave of the Snow Face was hard to find?"

"Like the tracks of birds; but the Red Eagle looked close and came upon the trail."

"There are many graves there in a pass in the hills, and there fell the braves of the Snow Face."

"Some miles away in a canyon is a pale-face tepee, and there are other graves near, and there are where the Snow Face and the pale-face robber band were buried."

"You have done well, Red Eagle, and when darkness comes on we will go to the grave of the Snow Face."

It was after the sun had set that the Cruel Face led her braves out of the timber, across the river, and with Red Eagle the guide on toward the canyon where the scene of this story opens.

The Red Eagle had shown wondrous skill in ferreting out that spot, for the massacre of the braves with the Snow Face when he was captured, had been thorough.

They had been ambushed by the Boys in Blue under Buffalo Bill, and they had been wiped out, while their chief had been taken prisoner to meet a different fate.

The Red Eagle had studied the situation, and had known the trail on which the ill-fated party had started, so had followed as closely as he could from what he deemed had been the course and thus had come upon the ambush scene.

From there he had held on in the direction of the canyon, after counting the graves of the dead braves, and the skeleton remains of their ponies, and had entered the retreat of the Brimstone Brotherhood.

There he had seen the cabin and not far from it the bones of horses, and the graves of those slain in the encounter.

He read signs well, and knew that the two graves apart must be those of soldiers, while the half-dozen together were doubtless the robber dead, for the Boys in Blue would not bury their dead with outlaws.

Then there was another grave, apart from the others, and was not this where lay the Snow Face?

This the Indian trailer resolved to find out. So he dug down into the grave until he came to the blanket-enveloped form, and though a couple of months had gone by since the body had been placed there, he knew that it was the form of the Renegade Chief.

So he filled in the grave, mounted his pony and started forth for the rendezvous appointed with the Renegade Queen.

By night only did the Renegade Queen move with her warriors, for she knew that by day they would be seen afar off if any scout from the fort should happen to be in the vicinity.

The sun was rising when the Indian squadron rode into the canyon, and Red Eagle led Cruel Face at once to the grave of the man she had so dearly loved.

"There is no mistake, Red Eagle?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"See where the Red Eagle pulled out the earth—he saw the face and form of the Snow Face."

"The Red Eagle speaks with a straight tongue."

"I know it; I feel it."

"Go with the braves up the valley."

"I will remain here to-day."

"At night come to me."

The Red Eagle departed, and soon there was not a brave in sight, for they had gone up the canyon and encamped.

The horse of the Renegade Queen was by the cabin, and she alone stood at the grave.

At her feet lay the body of the man she had loved, moldering into ashes, but idolized in memory.

Her stern face became lived, but the hard lines softened and she dropped down upon the mound with a moan that was wrung from her heart.

"Douglass, my chief, I know now that you are dead, that they murdered you."

"I needed only to see your grave to feel that

you were unconscious beneath my feet, to feel what now I feel against your slayers.

"My race are guilty, and I am brutal now in my hatred toward them.

"Love made me what I am, and love will make me all that I may become, cruel, vindictive, revengeful, my love for you, my dead idol.

"Oh, God! am I never more to see him, to feel the touch of his hand, the pressure of his lips upon mine?"

"The thought maddens me!"

And she sprung to her feet with savage vehemence.

The act perhaps saved her, for two men were just leaving a thicket near the entrance of the cavern to creep up on her, feeling that they would not be seen in her deep grief.

But her act caused them to spring back for shelter into the thicket, and yet she saw them not, so dimmed were her eyes with tears.

Placing her hand to her lips, she gave a long, shrill, peculiar call, and a moment after the sound of hoofs was heard, and an Indian horseman came down the canyon at a run.

The renegade waited until he drew rein near, and said:

"I will remain here for a few days, and my braves can rest.

"Let the Red Eagle prepare for the trail, for I would know if there is any force between me and the settlements."

"The Cruel Face has spoken, and the Red Eagle goes at once on the trail," was the response, and he rode back toward the upper end of the canyon.

Soon after, the renegade, who had taken up her quarters in the cabin, saw him coming toward the pass with half a dozen braves at his back.

She supposed that he meant to take them with him on the trail; but instead the chief left them as an outpost at the pass, a guard between the renegade and danger.

The Red Eagle loved the beautiful white queen of his people.

As he reached the pass his eyes detected fresh tracks, and he followed them.

They were the tracks left by two iron-shod horses, and alone he set forth upon the trail, which ended in the camp of the Braves in Buckskin.

CHAPTER XIX. GOLD POCKET'S IDOL.

THE sudden, quick act of the Lady Sport struck dumb with amazement the crowd gathered in Poker Hall, and at once showed them why she had written herself down as Bowie-knife Bessie.

Her aim had been as sure as a revolver, and though she had drawn the bowie-knife and thrown it like a flash of lightning, it had buried itself in the hand of the desperado, whose revolver was leveled at a mere boy.

The truth was, the youth had struck a lead that day, just as the desperado had come upon him, and had urged him to keep it a secret.

That night when drunk the desperado had determined to pick a quarrel with the boy, kill him and alone possess the secret.

But for the action of the Lady Sport he would have been successful.

As the blade sunk into his hand his revolver fell from his hand and exploded, the bullet shooting a miner in the leg, and a howl and a laugh followed.

As for the desperado, he turned like a mad bull upon the one who had wounded him, and dropped his left hand upon another revolver in his belt.

"Hold! hands off that weapon or I'll mark you again!"

The voice rung out like a bugle, and it was the Lady Sport who spoke.

But the maddened desperado did not heed, and with another quick movement the woman sent a second bowie-knife flying through the air, and the blade was buried in the forearm of the man.

He uttered a howl of rage, and still would have drawn his revolver when the words came:

"Hands up, now, or I'll send the third knife to the hilt in your head!"

There was that in the tone and look of the woman that awed the man, and he held aloft his hands, the right dripping blood, and with the knife sticking in it, the left with the blade buried to the hilt in the arm.

The Lady Sport stepped quickly forward, disarmed the desperado, and handing the revolver to Boniface, said:

"Keep this toy for him to play with some other time."

Then she drew out first one, then the other of her knives, wiped the blades carefully upon her handkerchief and said:

"We'll be better friends, pard, when you gvi up trying to shoot boys."

"Go to a doctor and tell him to send the bill to Bowie-knife Bessie!"

The man uttered a curse and strode out of the hall, while a yell that nearly raised the roof went up when Landlord Bony cried:

"Three cheers for Bowie-knife Bessie!"

The whole scene had not occupied more than a minute, and men who would have interfered

had not time to do so before the woman had mastered the situation and cowed the bully.

All eyes were upon her now, and with wonder, admiration and awe.

The young miners had all dressed up in their best, hoping to see the Mexican beauty who had come to make her home in Gold Pocket.

Now they saw her, and with a vengeance she had appeared before them.

If the first throw of the knife had been thought an accident in its aim, the second one had proven that it was simply the deadly aim of the thrower.

As serene as a May morn Bowie-knife Bessie passed on with the landlord, and after her crowded the youth she had saved from the desperado's bullet.

Then he overtook her, seized her hand and pressed it to his lips, while he said earnestly:

"You saved my life, lady, for he meant to kill me, indeed he did."

"You see I struck it rich to-day, and he came along and found me just as I found the lead, and he told me not to tell anybody, or they would murder me, as I was only a boy."

"So I told no one, and he picked a quarrel with me to-night to kill me, so that he alone would know where my find was."

"But you saved me, and half it pans out you shall have, indeed you shall."

The boy was about seventeen, bright-faced but ugly, and he looked as though he had been in hard luck.

He was known in the mines as Jersey, as he had said he was from New Jersey, and nothing else was known about him more than that he worked in the mines to get money to live on, and would spend most of his time hunting for a lead.

He neither gambled nor drank, and nothing was known against him, and Bravo Ben, the desperado, had asked him to come to Poker Hall, and when he did he at once picked a quarrel with him.

"I am glad I served you, my boy, and I assure you you will find a friend in me," answered the Lady Sport, and she turned to Landlord Bony and continued:

"As I told you I came here to gamble, so rent me a table by the month, and I guess I can find men who are willing to win a woman's money, or risk theirs against hers."

"You are right there, Miss Bessie, for men here will gamble with an angel, or the devil."

"A table is at your service, that one in the wing, with a window at your back, and it is not far across the yard to your cabin."

"It is the table I want, and I will begin work at once."

And the woman walked over to the empty table in a niche in the building, but from which she could see the entire room.

Before the hall had been enlarged it had been the bar, and just suited the ideas of the Lady Sport.

The table was a new one, covered with a red blanket drawn tightly over it and tacked beneath, and taking a chair with her back to the window, the Lady Sport coolly glanced over the room and the many wondering and admiring faces before her.

As she did so, a bat fluttered into the window and began to dart swiftly about the lamps, causing some of the miners who would not have dodged from a bullet, to duck their heads nervously.

"He is not a pet of yours, Bony?" said the woman, while an audacious smile crossed her face.

"Oh, no; I hate them."

"And I am afraid of them, so will kill him."

And quickly drawing her revolver, the report followed and the bat fell dead amid a group of miners, while the roof of the building almost rose under the yell of admiration for the woman who in less than ten minutes had established herself as Gold Pocket's Idol.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TEXAN'S REPORT.

"Now, Jack, what is your news?" and Buffalo Bill turned to Texas Jack, who, having refreshed himself with supper and a short rest, was ready to tell his story, for, as he had said, he had something important to tell.

"Well, Bill, you sent me to find out if the Sioux were on the war-path, or getting ready to go?"

"Yes, and I knew you could bring me the news if any man could, Jack."

"I did my best, and I'll tell you what we did."

"Nelse kept with you?"

"Oh, yes; and following your instructions, I readily struck the trail into the mountains where the Sioux had their village."

"But we came upon a large and fresh trail leading away from the village, so we decided that the red-skins had already started on the war-path."

"To follow them might be to run upon some of the warriors who were sent back, or dropped out, and I decided that we had best follow long enough to get the direction they were taking, and then head them off."

"This we did, and we reached a point which we knew was in advance of them, so Nelse and myself took different stands to wait for them, as I wished to count them, and then get on ahead and warn you."

"But we did not see any signs, after waiting nearly two days, so joined each other and started to head them off at another point, for we knew they must either be traveling very slow, or have changed their course."

"The next day we came upon their trail and followed it."

"It was heading toward Eagle Canyon—"

"Ah! Eagle Canyon," said Buffalo Bill, hastily.

"Yes, and I followed the trail, which was very fresh."

"We took to the ridge, and saw that they had not passed on into the canyon, and so awaited their coming."

"Soon they appeared, and at the distance we were from them I counted them as well as I could, and Nelse from another point did the same."

"What did you make their force, Jack?"

"One hundred and eighty."

"And Nelse?"

"He said he counted critically one hundred and eighty-seven."

"Then that doubtless makes their force two hundred, for some you doubtless missed, or they were scouting."

"I set them at that number, Bill."

"There are five villages in the tribe, so each village sent a chief and forty men."

"That is a good force, but not large enough to enter upon more than a raid."

"Still this may be only one column, and there might be a large force out, for if each village sent two hundred, then the fort would have to look out."

"Yes; but I was careful to note that only one column left the mountains, for they would have to come out at the pass where they could cross the river, or, as you say, go a four days' ride around, and this they would only do in case of intending a complete surprise."

"You are right; we have only this column to deal with, I am sure."

"But they camped in Eagle Canyon?"

"Yes; they passed on up into the upper end—all except one person."

"Ah! was she along?"

"If by she you mean the wife of the renegade chief you had executed, she was."

"She halted at the graves there?"

"Yes; and tell me, which was her husband's?"

"There are a couple of soldiers' graves together, and apart some fifty feet the outlaws are buried, while under a large pine in the edge of the timber is the grave of the renegade chief."

"That one is the grave where we saw her, for Nelse and I left our horses and crept on into the canyon."

"She was kneeling by it, and we saw her raise her hands as though she was taking an oath."

"There was not a red-skin in sight, so Nelse and I decided to capture the Renegade Queen."

"Great Caesar's ghost! but she was gorgeous, and the sun glistened upon her gold armlets, so it was a good spec any way to rope her in."

"We were going to creep around into the timber and come upon her while she was hugging her grief over her dead husband."

"It seemed a trifle mean, Bill, but we knew she was up to devilry and would make the Sioux worse than ever Snow Face did."

"But you relented, it seems, as I see that you did not bring her in with you," said the chief, with a smile.

"Nary relent, Bill; but we gave over the idea just as we were about to begin business, for she suddenly got over her grief and blew a whistle that brought some mounted warriors down the canyon at a gallop."

"We feared she had seen us, so we lighted out, regained our horses and waited at a good place to ambush them for over an hour, when, sure that we were not followed, we decided not to monkey around any longer, but to come at once to you and report."

"Did you destroy your trail?"

"As well as we could, until we struck the buffalo-trails."

"All right, we will be on hand to check these gentlemen, for I shall send a scout to Fort Fairview, another to the settlement, and one to each of the three posts, so they will be warned, and I will ask for Captain Forrester to join me with a hundred men and see if we can't capture this Renegade Queen, for she means mischief of the worst kind, Jack, and has simply gone to her husband's grave to renew the oath there that she made to me."

"But how was it she picked out his grave among the others?"

"Trust a woman for that, Bill, for they've got ways a man can never find out."

"I know 'em."

"Yes, you've had lots of experience, Jack, so I have heard, from those who knew you in Texas," and the scout spoke dryly, while Texas Jack blushed, at the remembrance of some es-

capade doubtless in which he had come off second best.

Buffalo Bill at once wrote several notes, and soon after five scouts rode away from the secret camp, and over beyond the lake took as many different trails.

Then Texas Jack started off after nightfall, accompanied by another scout, to report the movements of the Sioux, or if they still remained in Eagle Canyon.

The next day at noon the Texan and his companion returned in haste to the retreat and reported that the Renegade Queen and her braves had left the canyon and were heading toward Fort Fairview.

"To your saddles, Buckskins!" cried the chief, and before the order was obeyed there was a sight visible out upon the plains to rivet any eye.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BEAUTIFUL DECOY.

THE sight which met the eyes of the scout was a horse and rider far away out on the plains.

A moment's observation showed two things, first, that the rider was coming on at the full speed of his horse, and next, that he was coming toward the ridge in the summit of which the Braves in Buckskin had their retreat.

The chief of scouts leveled his glass, and all stood hiding in the thicket, awaiting what he would say.

"It must be a soldier courier, for he is in dark clothes, and Indians are doubtless in chase of him, though they have not appeared in sight yet."

Still keeping his eye to his glass, Buffalo Bill called out a minute after:

"Ah! as I supposed, there come Indians in pursuit."

"How many, Bill?" asked Texas Jack.

Counting them slowly the chief replied:

"Something over twenty, and I think there are no more behind."

"Go with the men, Nelse, all of them, and cross the lake to the foot-hills."

"I will come soon as I see what those fellows are after, and, Jack, you stay here."

The men departed, having put their traps together for a stay away of several days, while Buffalo Bill wiped the glasses carefully and again turned it upon the fugitive.

"Jack!" he said in a tone that fairly startled his companion.

"Well, Bill?"

"Have you heard aught of a wagon-train, Government's or settler's, coming west just now?"

"No, but one may be on the way to the fort."

"One must be, for yonder rider is a woman."

"The mischief you say, Bill!"

"Yes, a woman in a dark riding-habit, black slouch hat, and must be an officer's wife or daughter."

"Come, we must save her, Jack."

"We must at all hazards," and Texas Jack ran hastily after Buffalo Bill, who was already by the side of his horse.

Mounting, the two scouts rode at a swift gallop down the canyon, reached the lake and found Nelse awaiting them with the boat.

"Men all across, Nelse?"

"Yes, chief, and we'll soon be with 'em," and Nelse seized the oars, while the scouts held the reins of their horses.

The horses swam well, and the island was soon reached, the boat put away and the animals saddled.

Reaching the spot where the Braves in Buckskin awaited them, Buffalo Bill said:

"Boys, be ready for a hard ride and a fight."

"The one we saw chased by Indians is a woman, and we must rescue her."

"Come."

The Braves in Buckskin mounted and followed their chief at a gallop, around the base of the ridge.

Down through the foot-hills they went until they reached some timber which alone separated them from the rolling plain beyond.

Buffalo Bill here dismounted and went on foot to the edge of the timber.

His glass showed him the horsewoman not half a mile away and riding toward a thick fringe of timber upon the banks of a prairie stream.

Behind came the Indians in full chase and gaining.

The cry of the scout brought his men to his side, Texas Jack leading the chief's horse, and leaping into his saddle he led his Braves in Buckskin to the rescue.

Away they dashed over the plain, to head the fugitive off, and meet her pursuers, though two to one against them.

The Braves in Buckskin counted no odds when going to the rescue of a woman.

Who she was, what she was, they did not ask, or care, so long as she was in desperate danger.

Like the wind the horses, thoroughly fresh, swept over the plain, while the riders cheered to encourage the fugitive, whose horse seemed to be rapidly failing.

Straight for the belt of timber they rode, and it soon became evident that they would reach it about the time the fugitive did, perhaps a

little sooner, while the red-skin pursuers would arrive several minutes later.

"Once in the timber, Jack, and we can stand them off," said Buffalo Bill, as he went swiftly along, his rifle across his arm and ready for work.

"We can make it hot for them, Bill, and save the girl as well."

"Yes, but where are the rest of the band, for these are from the Renegade Queen's party?"

"Sure; but the rest may be still at the canyon and these be a scouting party; but where did that girl come from?"

"We will soon know," and with a cry to his men to push on, Buffalo Bill spurred forward, and an opening in the timber revealed the fugitive coming on, and the red-skins but a couple of hundred yards behind her.

She was not that far from the creek, and the scouts were yet nearer.

"By heavens, Jack, see there! we are trapped."

"Halt! fire into the timber yonder, all of you, and ready about!"

The words of Buffalo Bill were caused by suddenly beholding in the timber a number of red forms around a pony which, forced to lie down in hiding, had suddenly sprung to its feet.

At the same moment the woman on horseback was seen to quietly draw rein, and seemed to pay no attention to the red-skins in her rear.

"It is the Renegade Queen herself."

"Fire in the timber, pards!"

A volley of rifle-shots rung out, all aimed into the timber, and then a scattering fire from the repeating-rifles followed.

Wild yells broke from half a hundred throats, and red-skins and their ponies were now seen rising from the ground, where they had lain in ambush and were preparing to dart out upon the Braves in Buckskin.

But for the keen eyes of Buffalo Bill, who had recognized the Renegade Queen and detected the ambushed foe at the same time, the scouts would have dashed right on to certain death.

Then, the rapid fire, so unexpected, from the scouts, had demoralized the red-skins for a moment, and the Braves in Buckskin were in full flight before a return fire came from the Sioux, and when it did it fell short.

"A close call that, Jack."

"Yes, Bill; but the woman?"

"Is none other than the Renegade Queen."

"But she was dressed as an Indian girl when I saw her."

"Women change their dresses to suit their humor, Jack."

"Somehow she knew we were encamped in the vicinity, and she put on a riding-habit and plotted to get us into an ambush."

"Those fellows in the timber were sent there last night, and she played the decoy to entrap us."

"And but for your so quickly recognizing the situation, would have done so."

"Yes; and I saw the trap none too soon."

"See! there the beautiful decoy sits on her horse directing her warriors, and she has sent half a hundred after us."

"See! they are dividing in two forces, Bill."

"Yes; and that means mischief."

"Can there be more of them in ambush in the foot-hills?"

"Yes; for see there!"

And Texas Jack pointed to two more bands of red-skins, each half a hundred in number, coming out of the foot-hills from different points to head the scouts off.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WOMAN OF LUCK.

"A PACK of your best cards, please, and a bottle of champagne, Mr. Bartender," called out Bowie-knife Bessie when she took her place at the table in Poker Hall, which Landlord Bony had placed at her service.

It was evident that the landlord was interested in his new boarder.

She had arrived under circumstances that were mysterious, and since her coming she had shown remarkable nerve.

She was a deadly thrower of the bowie-knife, as she had shown, while her killing the swift-flying bat with her revolver proved her a dead shot.

"Dead shot that I am, I could not have done that," muttered the landlord, and the miners present were in ecstasies over the fair gambler.

The cards were brought by Landlord Bony himself, and also a quart bottle of champagne, for the new proprietor of the Roost had ordered a wagon-load of the best wines for his own use, and special occasions.

"Perhaps I should tell you that champagne is twenty dollars a bottle," whispered the landlord.

"I never ask the price of what I want, sir, nor care what it may be."

"Place the bottle there, please."

He put it upon the table, having cut the wires.

Then she took the pack of cards, opened them, glanced them over in a way that showed she

knew how to deal the pasteboards, and then placed the pack, with the backs of the cards upward, upon the cork of the champagne-bottle.

All watched her strange action curiously, and seeing it, she said with a bewitching smile:

"I am testing my luck, gentlemen, for I shall let the cork of this champagne-bottle throw the cards into the air as it flies out."

"They will fall upon the table, and then I shall read the faces, and see if I have more cards with the faces upward, than those with them turned down."

"If I have, I am a woman of luck here in Gold Pocket City, and if there are more backs up than faces, then I am not fortune's favorite."

"Do you see, Landlord Boniface?"

"Yes, I see, and will watch the result with interest."

The twine holding the cork was cut, and the cards were balanced on the top, and in breathless silence all awaited the result.

The bottle had been shaken, and the cork came up rapidly, flying upward with a report like a revolver-shot.

The cards flew into the air, scattered and fell in a shower, most of them upon the table, a few upon the floor, and the woman quietly gathered up those with the faces upward.

"Four aces, two kings, one queen, and every other card is a red one."

"I do not exactly like the hand, I am superstitious enough to say."

"See, landlord, the four aces prove me to be a woman of luck; but there are two kings, diamonds and hearts, who are my foes, and one queen, myself, clubs, and every other card with the face up is a red spot, which indicates blood."

"I don't just like it, for I, the queen of clubs, am in black, and the two kings are red."

"Well, I shall make my luck overwhelm my foes."

"Does any gentleman wish to play with me?"

"I will do so for three games, though I never play in my own quarters, but this is your opening night."

"Thanks for the honor done me, Landlord Boniface."

"What shall the stake be?"

"I leave that with you entirely."

"Call it the best two games in three, and a hundred the stake to be played for."

"As you please, Miss Bessie," was the reply, and the landlord took his seat at the table.

Every miner in the room had ceased playing to watch this game.

It was something new, so thoroughly out of the routine to see a woman gambling, and a beautiful one, too, and one over whom hung a mystery, that they could not tear themselves away from the table where she was.

The woman handled the pasteboards so deftly as to win plaudits from the lookers-on, and her face was perfectly serene during the game.

She lost the first game, but smiled sweetly, and won the next two, so coolly raked over the stakes, while she remarked:

"My luck is assured, landlord."

"Yes, and I congratulate you, though I am the loser."

"Come, Hazard Harry, try your fortune with the Lady Sport."

"Miss Bessie, this is Hazard Hale, a dangerous man to face in any game he plays, and a good fellow to boot."

"I warn you that he plays to win, and plays for big stakes only."

"Excuse me, as I have other duties that call me away," and Boniface Bill left the hall.

The one whom he had introduced as Hazard Harry was a young man of twenty-six or seven, with a face that was almost boyish.

It was a frank and fearless face, too, and his blue eyes seemed to look squarely into one's heart.

For a year he had been in Gold Pocket, and finding that he had little luck as a miner, he turned to cards, and the result was that he had been a bold and successful gambler.

He blushed like a boy when introduced to the Lady Sport, and stepping forward bowed low and gracefully, which brought a cry from some one:

"Bully for Hazard Harry! He knows jist how ter catch on with a pretty gal."

This embarrassed the young man the more, as a laugh followed the words, and he was crimson-faced and embarrassed as he took the seat which Bowie-knife Bessie motioned for him to sit down in, while she remarked pleasantly, at the same time holding forth her tiny hand:

"I am glad to meet you, Hazard Harry, and hope for many a pleasant game with you."

"What sum do you name for the stake?"

"I leave it to you, miss," was the low reply.

"Very well; suppose we make it the best three in five game and make the stake five hundred?"

Hazard Harry did not flinch under the sum named, as the woman seemed to expect him to do, for she kept her glorious eyes fixed upon his handsome face.

"It will suit me, miss."

The cards were dealt and the game was begun, and ended with Hazard Harry the winner.

The second game was begun and played to a finish, and again the woman was a loser.

She did not, however, lose her serenity, and not the slightest sign showed her thoughts.

Her face was expressionless as far as her emotions went, for they were not reflected.

"Boniface Bill warned you," said Hazard Harry.

"Oh, yes."

"Shall we call the game off as it is, for I never gambled with a woman—a lady before?"

"Let me explain to you, Hazard Harry, and to all others, that, though a woman, I seek no favors, ask none and give none."

"I am a gambler pure and simple, and take the consequences."

"Are you ready for our third game?"

"As you put it so, yes."

"I'll bet you a hundred I win the next three."

"I take the bet," and Hazard Harry dropped five twenty-dollar gold pieces on the table.

"The money is mine, Harry," she said with a wicked smile, rising from the table after winning three straight games.

"Yes, and you play a devilish fine game, so we will try it again."

"Not to-night, for I am a trifle fatigued—good-night," and the Lady Sport glided from the room, saluted by all the miners present.

She had certainly "caught on" in Gold Pocket City.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BLUE-COATS ON THE TRAIL.

AFFAIRS at the fort were progressing about as usual, the officers and their families trying to get all of the enjoyment out of their life on the border that was possible.

Colonel Cassidy, who had followed General Carr, a most popular officer, had proven himself a good commandant and was liked by all.

An old bachelor, he was yet most fond of society, though at times the expression upon his face, when dining with some of his married officers, whose home was a happy one, and whose family was about him, would be one of deep sadness, and a few in the fort recalled that there had been a love romance in the colonel's early life, which had left its shadow upon his heart.

He seemed to particularly admire Kate Kennerley, and one evening as he called at Major Denton's and found the heiress alone, she asked him to sit down upon the piazza and await the return of the major and his wife, who had gone for a walk.

"How like your mother you are, Miss Kennerley," suddenly said the colonel.

"My mother! did you know her, sir?" eagerly asked the maiden.

"Yes."

"Oh, tell me of her!"

"Why, did your mother die before you could remember her?" he asked, surprised.

"Colonel Cassidy, all I know about my mother is that she was a Mexican."

"After her death my father took me to live in the City of Mexico, and then to the border, where he had a command, for he had entered the army."

"When he died, he sent to the United States, to my Uncle Lucius, who was stationed at McPherson, and he became my guardian."

"I hardly knew my uncle, and he was killed, you remember, nearly a year ago."

"Can you tell me more?"

"Your father was an officer in the army, and a gallant one; but he was taken prisoner during the Mexican War, and his life was saved by a Mexican lady; your mother was a Señorita Bonita Vilez, and your father loved her and they were married."

"Your father got a commission as commander of lanceros, and was stationed on the frontier, where I met him again, and your mother also."

"You were then a little girl of three years, and I am happy to renew my acquaintance with you again, and let me congratulate you upon being a true soldier's daughter."

"It is a pleasure to hear that you were my father's friend, for I have no one near me now whom I knew in the past."

"All are good to me, though, and I love dear old Major Denton and his beautiful wife as though they were really bound to me by kindred ties, and Mrs. Denton, you know, was my father's friend—but here comes Captain Forrester to see you."

And the young officer was seen turning into the avenue that led to "Fort Welcome," as Major Denton's hospitable home was called.

"And why not to see you, instead of me?" asked the colonel, with a suggestive smile.

"Ah! Captain Forrester, though ever polite, does not visit me."

"And then, I saw him go first to your quarters."

"I believe that you were his friend in all his trouble, Miss Kennerley?"

"Oh, yes; we at Fort Welcome never believed the charges against him, black as they looked at one time; but there is always, I deem it, the stamp of innocence or guilt in one's face, and I could never read aught but 'Not guilty' in Captain Forrester's."

"You are right, for I so read it; but he is a splendid officer, and I rather admire his refusal

to be friendly with those who made every effort to prove him guilty."

"Why, they still are trying to prove that there is something about the man, in spite of all charges being disproven."

"Yes, Colonel Cassidy, and I believe he will yet show that what seems mysterious in his actions now is not crime."

"You refer to this strange creature who twice deceived us all—first as the Boy Bugler and then as Miss Meserole?"

"Yes; and a remarkable, mysterious, beautiful creature she is," replied Kate Kennerley, lowering her voice, as the officer was now within a few yards of the piazza.

He saluted the commandant, raised his hat gracefully to Kate, and said:

"Pardon me for disturbing you, Colonel Cassidy, and you also I crave pardon of, Miss Kennerley, for breaking in upon the colonel's visit; but a courier has arrived from the Northwest and reports having crossed an Indian trail leading down from the mountains where the Sioux have their village."

"It was a trail, he said, made by fully a hundred warriors, so they must be on a raid, and as we have heard nothing from Cody, I was going to ask if I could not take three or four companies and go on a scout?"

"Certainly, Captain Kennerley, you can go, and I am glad to have you, for I too am anxious about Cody, as we have no messenger from him for ten days."

"There is some cause for alarm, sir, as those Indians are on the war-path, and were heading for the locality where I know Cody's retreat to be."

"Can I take Surgeon Powell with me sir?"

"Well, yes, as the assistant surgeons can look after the fort; but why take four companies?"

"They were reported, sir, about a hundred strong, and of course must be moving in large force, with other columns as well."

"I hardly think so, for since Buffalo Bill so summarily executed their renegade chief, Snow Face, they have been cowed."

"His wife remains, sir, the Renegade Queen."

"Nonsense! what can a woman do as the head of a tribe of red-skins?"

"Much, sir, if she is a woman bent on mischief, and has ability, added to the spirit of revenge, as I heard from Cody is the case with this fair renegade."

"Women can do much, Colonel Cassidy, for evil, when they set their hearts upon it," was the rather earnest response, and somehow into the minds of both the colonel and Kate came the thought of the woman who had masqueraded as the Boy Bugler and Miss Meserole.

"I still believe the Sioux will not send out more than a raiding-party, so two companies will be sufficient, I think."

The young officer bowed, as though the last remark settled the matter, and asked:

"Can I depart at once, sir?"

"Certainly."

"With no time limit to return, sir?"

"I leave that to you, Forrester, and success to you."

"Thank you, sir," and with a bow the officer was turning away when Kate Kennerley said, as she extended her hand:

"And I too say success to you, Captain Forrester—good-by."

He grasped her hand, turned and was gone, and Kate Kennerley saw him ride out of the fort half an hour after with eighty blue-coats following him.

"Somehow, I wish the colonel had allowed him to take more men," she muttered, as from her window she saw the troopers disappear over a rise in the prairie, and a moment after she added, in a low, earnest tone: "I would give much to read the secret the heart of that man holds."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BLUE-COATS TO THE RESCUE.

THE face of the young captain, as he rode out of the fort, after leaving Colonel Cassidy and Kate Kennerley, was a study.

The lips were sternly set, as with some feeling of bitterness, while in the eyes dwelt a strange look of sadness.

With a toss of his head he seemed to shake off the feeling upon him and turn to the duty on hand, for he said to Surgeon Powell, who rode by his side:

"Frank, I wish the colonel had allowed me to take four companies."

"You asked him?"

"Yes, and he said two were enough; but I swelled the force all I could, and, as you see, besides my own company took picked detachments from the others, and I have four-score as gallant fellows as ever wore spurs."

"You have indeed, Fred," said Surgeon Frank Powell, glancing admiringly over the men behind him.

There was Captain Alfred Tabor of B Company, with six of his own men, and the detachments from the others of the regiment, and with him were two lieutenants, both daring, dashing officers.

"A" Company, "Forrester's Own," as it was

called, had forty men in the ranks, two lieutenants, and the non-commissioned officers.

There were therefore in the command, with commissioned and non-commissioned officers, just ninety men, and Black Bird, Surgeon Powell's negro servant, black as ink, immense in stature, and brave as a lion, brought up the rear with two pack-horses in lead, while there were for the other officers and men four large mules bearing packs, for Fred Forrester always looked to the comfort of his soldiers.

"You dread that the reds are out in force, then, Fred?" said Frank Powell.

"Yes, for I feel sure that Buffalo Bill has all his men busy, or we would have heard from him."

"I only hope he has not been overwhelmed."

"So do I; but Bill is not the man to be caught in a trap, though we are all of us liable to get into trouble some day."

"I am glad I have you along, Frank, for you are worth a dozen men, and I feel that my command is good for thrice their number, at least."

It was the next morning, as the squadron was moving along on the trail, that a horseman was seen coming toward them at a gallop.

"It is a scout, and one of Cody's—yes, it is Lucky Luke," said Surgeon Powell.

And soon after the horseman dashed up and, saluting, said:

"Going to the fort, sir, with dispatches from Chief Cody, to report red-skins in force on the war-path, and four other scouts sent to the different posts."

"All right, Luke; but where is Buffalo Bill?" asked the captain.

"Left him at the retreat, sir; and he was to take the trail with the balance of the boys."

"Then I shall find him in that neighborhood?"

"Yes, sir; thereabouts—any word to send, sir?"

"Only say to Colonel Cassidy that you found me this far on my way, and I will feel obliged if he will send Captain Bainbridge with two other companies to support me."

"I will meet them, or have a messenger there to do so, at Sentinel Hill."

"Yes, sir."

And Lucky Luke shot away on his ride to the fort, while the pace of the troopers was hastened to a trot.

It was in the afternoon, as they were moving along after an hour's rest, when shots were heard not a mile away.

Instantly came the order to prepare for hot work, and a halt was ordered.

The saddle-girths were tightened, the weapons loosened in scabbard and holster, and the men mounted ready for the charge.

On they went at a sweeping gallop, while the firing continued, and grew louder and louder.

They were in a valley, a prairie vale, with a stream upon one side and a ridge of timber upon the other.

Beyond was a plain with a large stream, the banks heavily timbered, and a ridge, fringed with a thicket that was very dense in growth, and from the latter a long string of Indian horsemen were emerging and moving toward the river.

From the latter had come a party of horsemen, ten in number, and they were whites.

Behind them, in full pursuit were four-score Indian warriors, mounted, and with yells dashing swiftly along.

Thus was the small band of horsemen caught between two bodies of foes, and had to fight a force of twenty to one against them.

Over in the timber the keen eye of Captain Forrester detected other foes, but how many he had no means of knowing.

The small band of pale-faces were the Boys in Buckskin, and that there was no hope for them they seemed to realize, for instead of pushing on, as though to break through the Indian line ahead of them, they suddenly huddled together into a solid mass, halted and faced their enemies.

Buffalo Bill and his Braves in Buckskin were at bay.

Captain Forrester had halted his men before dashing through the timber into view.

He had ridden on with Frank Powell, dismounted and observed the situation.

"Brave Cody! they have brought him to bay, and he intends to die game, for he knows not we are near."

"No, and the red-skins do not know it, either, so we will gain a surprise."

"How many, at a rough guess, are they?"

"I should say all of two hundred, with more counties to hear from," replied Frank Powell.

"I would fight them to save Cody and his Boys in Buckskin, were they a thousand."

"Attention, battalion! forward, march!"

His voice rung out and the soldiers came on to where he sat on his horse with the Surgeon Scout, awaiting them.

Then came the order in trumpet tones:

"Charge!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RENEGADE QUEEN'S BOLD PLOT.

THE Red Eagle was the king of trailers. He had won fame in the village of his people when a mere boy by his success as a hunter.

He trapped game and kept his mother's tepee supplied, while others his elders could not do so.

He killed his first bear when but thirteen, and saved the life of a wounded chief by doing so.

His father was a great chief, and upon the day of his birth had killed a red eagle, one whose feathers by some freak were of a reddish-brown instead of gray.

This gained for the boy his name of Red Eagle, and on that same day of his birth the Sioux had gained a great victory over their foes the Cheyennes.

When but sixteen the boy had taken his first scalp, that of a Pawnee chief, and so he won his spurs, and before the age when an American boy can vote, he was a chief, and a noted one.

Tall, an athlete in form, with a bold face and piercing eyes, a voice low and mellow in conversation, and like a trumpet in anger, Red Eagle was the idol of the Sioux maidens.

But, from the coming of the Renegade Queen among his people he had had eyes for her alone.

She was the wife of his great chief, Snow Face, who taking a fancy to the young Sioux had done much to advance him; but he loved the beautiful Cruel Face.

She was a pale-face, he a red-skin, yet she was his idol, and he was her slave.

She knew his regard for her, though he had never uttered a word to her of it, and so she made use of him and he enjoyed serving her.

He did for her what he would have had one of his warriors do for him; but she flattered his vanity by making him believe that no one else could accomplish what she asked of him.

So he had gone upon the trail to discover if there were pale-face scouts about, between her and the blows she would strike.

His quick glance had caught the trail leading from the canyon, and he had followed it, for he knew that it was a fresh one.

He had tracked the two riders, Texas Jack and his companion, to the shores of the lake, and he had seen them in a boat, while their horses swam.

So he had boldly hidden his outer costume and entered the lake to solve the secret of the retreat, and he had done so.

Unseen even by the eagle-eyed scouts, who suspected no foes' presence, he beheld their camp and also saw the tall, never-mistaken form of the chief, Buffalo Bill.

He had won a triumph, and back on the trail he went.

He made the long swim down the lake, removed his costume and arms, and mounting his horse set out for the Eagle Canyon.

"The Red Eagle has returned soon," said the Renegade Queen, when he appeared before her.

"The Red Eagle has news for the ears of the Cruel Face."

"So soon?"

"The Red Eagle does not crawl when the Cruel Face bids him run."

"He found a trail, of two white braves, and they were in the Eagle Canyon; they saw the Cruel Face at the grave of the dead chief, and they went to tell their chief all they had seen, that the Sioux, with the Renegade Chief at their head, were on the war-path."

"The Red Eagle followed their trail by land and water, and found the hidden camp of the great scout, Pa-he-has-ka,* and his scouts—so many the eyes of the Red Eagle saw," and he held up his hand three times to denote fifteen.

"The Red Eagle is a great chief, and he could return to the retreat of Pa-he-has-ka?"

"Yes, and the braves of the Cruel Face can wear the scalps of the white trailers at their belts."

"But their retreat is a strong one, and it would be good to bring them out, for if they saw from hill lookout a few red-skins upon the plain they would come out to capture them, and the braves of the Cruel Face could be in ambush and kill or capture all."

"The Red Eagle speaks with a wise tongue; but I will take another plan, for the Cruel Face will draw them out of their den."

"Let the Red Eagle listen."

"The ears of the Red Eagle are open."

"The pale-faces were my people, and I know them well, and in my pack I have a riding-suit such as the white squaws use when going on horseback."

"I will put it on and appear far off from the scouts' hill, and have twenty of my braves in chase."

"They will see that I am a pale-face, and think that I am from some wagon-train, and will come to the rescue."

"The Red Eagle must to-night place my other warriors in ambush in timber toward which I ride, and the scouts will dash upon them."

"Other braves can hide in other timber so as to cut them off, and the scouts will fall at the hands of my braves."

"Does the Red Eagle understand?"

"The Cruel Face speaks with the wise tongue of an old medicine-chief."

"The Red Eagle hears her words and will obey."

* Buffalo Bill is known among the Sioux tribes as Pa-he-has-ka, which, interpreted, means Long Hair. THE AUTHOR.

"But the Red Eagle must know that the Long Hair, the great pale-face chief, is to be taken alive."

"If a brave of my people harms him he shall die, for the white chief must go to the village of the Sioux, there to die."

"Let the Red Eagle tell each brave this."

"It is as the Cruel Face says, and the warriors must be on the trail with the night."

"It shall be so."

"Let my warriors prepare and my chiefs know the wishes of the Cruel Face."

The Red Eagle departed upon his errand up the canyon, while the Renegade Queen entered the cabin, and half an hour after appeared in a dark-blue riding-habit, black slouch hat and was ready for her work as a beautiful decoy.

While the scouts slept in security, little dreaming that Texas Jack had been trailed by the Red Eagle, the latter was quietly placing the braves in position for an ambush and the Renegade Queen was going to the position she intended to start from on her clever scheme to capture Buffalo Bill and his Braves in Buckskin.

That both the Renegade Queen and the Red Eagle did their work well the reader has already seen.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A STRANGE COMBAT.

WHEN Captain Fred Forrester and the gallant troopers dashed out of the timber with the ringing cheer of the gallant —th Cavalry, they were well under a swift run before the Sioux seemed to realize that friends of the scouts were near.

"Steady, men! keep close, and follow me!"

Such were the orders given by the young commander of the troopers.

He was in his element now, for it was in scenes of deadly peril that he had won his rapid promotions to the rank of a captain years before his thirtieth year.

His handsome face was stern, his fierce eyes blazing, and his revolver was ready in his right hand, for it was with that weapon the blue-coats meant to do execution.

They saw that the red-skins were more than two to one in sight, and there were more beyond the timber, but how many they neither knew nor cared.

"Oh, for four companies, now!"

"If Colonel Cassidy had only let me have them, we could sweep this field," said Fred Forrester to Surgeon Powell, who rode near him.

The face of the latter wore a smile.

He always smiled when danger was deadliest, and now he was going to the rescue of his best friend, Buffalo Bill.

Along the line in front of the men rode the other officers, eager for the fray, and the men followed, solid as a wall, a dangerous, death-dealing machine, they seemed.

The scouts, as I have said, had rallied in a group and stood at bay, with the red-skins sweeping down upon them from four points of the compass, and red-skins in force that was overwhelming.

But not a man flinched, and they would die there in their tracks, while many a warrior would keep them company.

Back in the timber Captain Fred Forrester had left a corporal and two men, and the three negro servants, with the pack-horses, and with this exception all his force was taken to the rescue.

The cheer, ringing, encouraging to friend, defiant to foe, was the first intimation that the Sioux had of the presence of the soldiers on the scene.

Two more minutes would have hemmed in the scouts, whose rifles were already ringing out death-knells upon the enemy.

They were a solid, determined, desperate band, ready for the work of death.

Their volleys of rifle-shots had rung out at long range, then at shorter range, ere they, too, saw the blue-coats, for they had not looked for aid, not expecting it.

Their voices arose in a wild yell at the sight, and their third volley was a terrible one, not from hope, but on account of nearer range.

The shots of the Indians, who were here and there with a carbine and rifle, with a few score revolvers, had not told on the scouts, for they reserved their deadly fire, remembering the order of the Renegade Queen.

Their arrows were sent in showers, but not to kill, only to intimidate, for they meant not to harm the long-haired chief of the scouts.

They preferred to take all alive, in fact, and believed their game surely entrapped.

The torture of half a score white men would be so grand an affair for their people up in the mountains to witness.

But as they pressed on, going toward a common center, the cheer of the Boys in Blue, rushing to the aid of the Braves in Buckskin, reached their ears with startling distinctness.

They all glanced wildly toward the timber, and the lines of red-men swerved, staggered and seemed to break in a dozen pieces.

The Red Eagle, in his fury at the coming rescue, wheeled his own braves into column and determined to ride down the scouts, while his

voice rung out in an order for the other three chiefs to face the coming soldiers.

The order was quickly obeyed, and the soldiers found about a hundred and fifty warriors to charge down upon, while the group of scouts saw that they had to meet a red avalanche of death.

Over in the timber the Renegade Queen sat upon her horse, viewing, as she believed, the certain capture of Buffalo Bill, and the utter annihilation of his band.

Her revenge was nearer to her, she thought, than she had hoped for, and all through the daring and skill of the handsome young chief, Red Eagle, the "Dandy Sioux," as she had nicknamed him, from his always looking so tidy and dressing so gorgeously.

Suddenly a red-skin brave rode up to her and said a few words in a hasty manner, at the same time pointing back over the plains.

There were with the Renegade Queen the score or so warriors who had been in the chase after her, and they were resting their ponies after the hard run.

This was the force seen by the soldiers, and gave reason for the belief that there were many more warriors there to dash out and come to the relief of their comrades who were charging down upon the scouts.

When the Renegade Queen heard the report of the Indian courier, who had just come into the timber, she smiled triumphantly and glanced out upon the prairie beyond.

"The great medicine-chief, Red Tomahawk, back at the village, had become fearful of harm to the Queen of the Sioux, and had sent the Chief Wild Buffalo with many braves to follow the trail of the Cruel Face."

At another time the Renegade Queen might have been angered at the coming upon her trail of another force, but now, as the scouts must be taken, there must be no chance for one to escape, she was glad of the coming of the Wild Buffalo, who she knew must bring as large a force as her own.

Then, too, flushed with the hope of present victory, with four hundred warriors at her call, she could extend her raid and make the soldiers in the forts even tremble at her power.

So she told the Indian courier to go and hurry the warriors on, and as he darted away her ears caught the ringing cheer of the soldiers, and she beheld them dash out of the timber.

Her face became livid with passion, and she bit her lips nervously.

Then she said through her shut teeth:

"My God! am I to be foiled?"

"No; my own braves are more than two to one against them, and the Wild Buffalo will soon be here."

"There are not four-score of those blue-coats—unless there are more back in the timber."

Calling to one of her braves, she bade him ride like the wind and bring the Wild Buffalo and his warriors in all haste to the scene, and mentally she thanked the old medicine-chief for having sent the extra force on her trail.

In the mean time the Red Eagle and his band of fifty were almost upon the scouts, who still stood at bay, and the other three bands and the troopers were not two hundred yards apart.

Nervously glancing over the plains the Renegade Queen saw that the Wild Buffalo and his braves were in sight a third of a mile away, and pressing their tired horses on with all speed.

A cry of joy broke from her lips as she saw too that the force of Wild Buffalo must be even larger than her own, and she cried, savagely:

"With five hundred warriors I will yet have my revenge!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LADY SPORT "AT HOME."

WHEN the miners of Gold Pocket City entered Poker Hall the next evening after the arrival of the Lady Sport they did not know the nook assigned to that fair comer into the wilds of the mining region.

She had secured, some way, some red blankets and tacked them around the walls of her corner and decorated them with other colors.

The window behind her had been so arranged that she could make a very quick exit or entrance through it, and at the same time, by a bar, stop pursuit in that direction.

Her table had been raised upon a platform, and her own seat, with its back to the window, was raised off and was a foot higher than the others, so that she sat like a queen upon a throne.

Had any one gotten over the railing and examined her end of the table, they would have found there, hidden under the projecting end, a repeating-rifle on brackets, two revolvers swung in holsters nailed to the table, and half a dozen bowie-knives, the blades slipped into slits in the table, the hilts ready to her hand.

Thus, when seated at her place ready for play, the Lady Sport had a perfect arsenal within her grasp, not to speak of the belt of arms she wore.

Behind her on the wall she had placed several ornaments, ingeniously made of playing-cards.

There were a crown, star, crescent, and devices strangely and skillfully made.

Such was the Lady Sport's Den, as the miners called it, when Poker Hall was thrown open for the night's sport, and the place met their vision.

All day long the talk of the camps had been the Lady Sport, and one and all decided that she was "a daisy."

Bravo Ben lay in his cabin growling with pain and nursing his wounded hand and arm, which "Pills, the medicine-sharp," had very skillfully dressed for him.

Bravo Ben was revengeful, and he vowed to his intimates that, when his wounds healed, the Lady Sport should either marry him or leave Gold Pocket City, while the boy, Jersey, would turn up missing some fair morning.

The miners to a man admired the plucky woman, and that she had luck at play, and would play against odds, she had shown in her games with Bony, the landlord, and the young miner.

As for Landlord Boniface, he had become strangely interested in the young and beautiful woman.

Who was she?

What was she?

Why had she come to Gold Pocket City?

Was she not playing some deep game?

Might she not be a female detective in the service of the Government, or was she one of Dave Cook's Rocky Mountain Detective force?

Such were the questions which Boniface Bill asked himself, yet could not satisfactorily answer.

"I must go slow," he muttered to himself.

But all the same he could not banish her beautiful face from before his eyes, and half in earnest said:

"I believe I am already in love with her."

What she had asked for she got at the hotel, and when Jersey, whom she had saved from the bravo's pistol, brought her a large bunch of wild flowers, which he had gone at daylight to gather, she asked him to help her that day fit up her nook in Poker Hall, and her own quarters, and she was surprised at the taste he displayed.

Jersey was delighted in serving the beautiful woman, and tried to urge upon her the acceptance of half of his interest in his new find; but this she would not accept under any consideration, and urged the boy to lay up his gold and get away from the evil influences of the mines as soon as he was able to do so.

In her cabin quarters Bowie-knife Bessie fitted herself up in equally comfortable shape, and Jersey helped her.

Her cabin was on the point of a hill above the hotel, and could be approached only by a narrow path up the rocks, while it was hardly more than a hundred yards distant.

In the rear the former occupant of the cabin, Gambler Gaul, had built him a stable, and Boniface Bill had made up his mind to present his fair boarder with a riding animal, when Jersey came to the office and told him that Bowie-knife Bessie wished to purchase two of the best horses to be found in the mining country.

This was Bony's chance, and he went up to the cabin with a claybank, with snow-white tail and mane, and certainly a splendid animal.

"You must accept this horse from me, Miss Bessie," he said.

"Thank you, no, I accept no favors; but I wish to buy two animals, so name your price for that one, please."

"Will you not change your mind for my sake?"

"For my own sake I will not."

"What is the animal worth?"

"He is not for sale."

"Have you any that are?"

"Yes, I will give you the pick of my stables, and if you like this one you can have him too."

"Name his price."

"Two hundred."

"I will take him, and if you have a better animal send him along, and never mind the price."

Thus urged Bony Bill soon returned with a bay mare that was even a fairer animal than the claybank.

"What will you do for a saddle?"

"I came prepared, for I have saddle and bridles in my trunk."

"What price for this mare, please?"

"Two hundred and fifty."

"Here is your money."

And Bowie-knife Bessie counted out the amount for the two horses, and then arranged with Jersey to take the care of them, telling him to take up his quarters at the hotel and she would pay all expenses, as he would be useful to her.

Late in the afternoon she mounted the bay, and with Jersey on the claybank went out for a look at the surroundings of her new home, as also to try the horses.

It was sunset when she returned, and, having changed her saddle to the claybank, she told Boniface Bill that the animals suited her in every particular.

"And a more beautiful rider I never saw," said the landlord.

"I have had a great deal of practice," was the quiet reply.

And the Lady Sport went on to her cabin.

but two hours after glided in through the window and took her place at her table in Poker Hall, ready to play against any one that dared face her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FIGHTING AGAINST ODDS.

WHEN the Renegade Queen gave utterance to the threat of revenge, which the presence of five hundred warriors would enable her to accomplish, she saw that Wild Buffalo had in his force nearly three hundred braves.

Her practice in seeing warriors massed since a dweller among the red-skins, enabled her to get a very fair estimate at a glance of those coming to her aid.

She took in the situation with the eye of a skilled officer, and saw that if the troopers broke the line of Sioux they would stampede, while if Red Eagle did not ride down and capture Buffalo Bill and his scouts, the victory for her would be lost, but for the coming of Wild Buffalo and his reinforcements.

So she rode out of the timber to urge on the coming braves, and seeing her they uttered a wild war-cry and spurred on their ponies the faster.

Again in the timber, the Renegade Queen beheld what she had feared, that the mass of warriors went down before the charge of the troopers.

The red-skins opened fire first, and brought down and wounded a few riders and their horses; but the soldiers did not heed this, and in another moment came the order from Fred Forrester:

"Fire!"

He had before had the troopers bring their carbines to a ready, and the volley was a severe one, for red-skins and ponies bit the dust.

Then the carbines were slung at their backs, and the revolvers opened sharply when the order came:

"Use your revolvers now, men, and shoot to kill!"

This rattling and deadly fire, followed by the cheering, dashing, irresistible avalanche of horses and riders, broke the Indian line, and they fled, rallied, broke again, and then stampeded toward the timber, to suddenly be checked, as the Renegade Queen dashed into view waving her lance, and behind her came the tried, panting force of Wild Buffalo.

"Halt! and use your carbines now," shouted Fred Forrester, as he beheld this new force, and which checked his pursuit of the red-skins.

The order was obeyed, and a rattling fire was opened upon the timber, the young officer calling out:

"Don't fire near that woman, men!"

In the mean time Red Eagle, with the eye of his Queen upon him, was rushing down upon the little band of scouts.

"Form a line, boys, and let your repeating-rifles speak," said Buffalo Bill, who was at one end of the line, with Texas Jack at the other.

Had the scouts been armed with carbines, that would have ended their career; but each one had a repeating-rifle, fired to kill, and the rapid, steady fire of a hundred shots broke Red Eagle's warriors all up.

Had also the force not been divided by the soldiers' coming, the scouts also would have been doomed; but fifty Indians were not enough to ride them down, and no one recognized the fact quicker than did Chief Red Eagle.

He saw that it was a defeat, and before the eyes of the Renegade Queen; but there was nothing to do but to get out of a bad situation as quickly as possible, as he saw the defeat of the other force left the soldiers and scouts with only his broken half-hundred between them.

It is true a couple of scouts fell, and two more were slightly wounded, while half a dozen of their horses went down; but the remainder were not to be easily overrun, and his own force had suffered heavily.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill dashed out and captured two Indian ponies, and Texas Jack caught another, while a fourth trotted up to where the scouts stood at bay and was taken.

This mounted the riderless scouts, and the saddles were quickly changed from the dead to the living animals, and the two scouts who had fallen, one dead, the other wounded, were placed behind the couple of slightly wounded Boys in Buckskin.

Then the chief gave the order:

"Forward, and we'll reach that gallant band of soldiers!"

And he added:

"I fear they have gotten into trouble, for, Jack, do you see that other column of Sioux?"

"I see them, Bill."

"The Queen comes well supported, and will give us a hard fight of it, if she don't worst us, for Forrester has not a hundred men."

"You are right; but he'd fight them, Bill, if he did not have half a hundred."

"You are right, and what a splendid charge he made."

"I nearly let that Indian chief get hold of me in watching it, and the fellow seemed bullet-proof, for I sent three shots squarely at his head."

"And clipped his feathers, for I saw them fly."

"But I thought he had you, Bill— See there!"

The last remark was caused by suddenly seeing the Renegade Queen ride out of the timber, and the Sioux at her back, for from the scouts had the reinforcements under Wild Buffalo been seen as they approached.

"Men, we must join the gallant Braves in Buckskin—forward!" and Captain Forrester led the charge down toward the scouts, who, hampered as they were, came on but slowly.

In the mean time a corporal had been sent back to the timber in their rear, with four wounded men, who were yet able to ride, and two dead soldiers, but this move seemed to be unnoticed by the red-skins, for no effort was made to flank them.

Down toward the scouts, distant some five hundred yards, rode Fred Forrester and his soldiers, and a wild cheer broke from the lips of the troopers, a yell of triumph from the Braves in Buckskin, as the forces united.

"Bravo, Captain Forrester!"

"I knew you were the only man that dared do what you did," and Buffalo Bill grasped the young officer's hand.

"I had started out to look you up, Bill, and met your courier, so pushed on."

"How many red-skins have you in front?"

"About five hundred, I guess, sir, minus a score your men and mine killed; but let us show a bold front, sir, and move toward them, for they are preparing to charge and surround us."

"All right, Cody, and we will have to fight to the death, for this looks bad for us; but I am one to never say die until after the funeral," and the young captain laughed recklessly, while Surgeon Powell rode up and warmly shook hands with Buffalo Bill, and said:

"You made those fellows fly about like they had struck a stone wall, Bill."

"Have you any more men, captain?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"I left a corporal and two men, with three negroes and our pack-horses, in the timber, and just sent five wounded men back there—that is all."

"Then we have to fight to the death, sir."

"Yes, and will; but I only wish Colonel Cassidy had given me the other two companies I asked for, and a six-pound gun I intended to have brought, and yonder red-skins would be taught a bitter lesson."

"The Renegade Queen, the wife of Snow Face, is in command."

"Yes, I saw her; but let us move."

And the order was given to march, and, with the scouts on either wing, the Boys in Blue advanced toward the timber, firing their repeating-rifles and carbines as they advanced.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A BUGLE-CALL.

THE Renegade Queen was somewhat surprised at the bold move of the troopers advancing upon her with their small force.

It also seemed to surprise her chiefs, and the suspicion was that it would indicate that the red-skins had not yet met the full force of soldiers—that there were more yet to come.

It was a bitter blow to the Renegade Queen to see the soldiers and Braves in Buckskin united, for it showed her that to gain her revenge she must capture all, and the nerve she had seen shown by the whites already convinced her that this would be no easy task.

She could not, however, blame her chiefs, Red Eagle and Panther Eye, for they certainly had planned well and done their best, and she held out her hand to each one as he came up with his broken force to show that she held no ill-will.

Still, renegade though she was, she yet could not but admire her own race for the magnificent courage shown, and a sigh broke from her lips that a cruel destiny had forced her to become what she was.

Panther Eye and his horses, in straggling groups, had first reached the timber, just as Wild Buffalo and his warriors had arrived, and they were all checked by the woman, until a few minutes after Red Eagle and his band came up.

She had noted the fact that the Red Eagle had dashed into the midst of the scouts and yet escaped, so she was not surprised to see a wound upon his forehead, where a bullet had cut its way, and that his left arm hung limp by his side.

But Red Eagle did not seem to notice his wounds, a third one from a bullet being in the fleshy part of his thigh.

The Renegade Queen had extended her hand to Chief Wild Buffalo as he came up, and a wave of her hand had arrested his charge.

He was a large, evil-faced Indian of forty, and yet he had a record second only to Red Eagle.

"The great Chief Wild Buffalo is welcome, and the Cruel Face thanks the mighty medicine-man, Red Tomahawk, for sending him and his brave warriors to her aid, and they will be repaid by many scalps."

The chief seemed pleased at his welcome, and

the Red Eagle then came up and was greeted, but his face was stern, his eyes glittering.

"The Panther Eye and Wild Buffalo will place their braves yonder, on either side, while the Cruel Face dresses the wounded arm of the Red Eagle," the woman said; but the chief drew back and said:

"No, the Red Eagle is no child to cry with pain, and his enemies are before him.

"Will the Cruel Face let the Red Eagle lead her warriors against the pale-faces, for she must not face the bullets?"

The woman smiled, and replied:

"The Red Eagle does not know the Cruel Face, for she will lead her warriors, and no bullet will harm her.

"See! the pale-face soldiers advance, so let my warriors be ready."

The situation was a strange one, and a thrilling one as well.

The Indians who had been beaten off in the one case, and failed to capture the scouts in the other, had gained renewed courage with the arrival of Wild Buffalo and his band.

The latter had ridden hard, for the medicine-chief, Red Tomahawk, had pretended to see signs in the moon and stars that the Renegade Queen was in danger, so had dispatched the Wild Buffalo to her aid with all haste, and the chief had spared neither pony or brave, and arrived just as he was needed most, so his horses and men were tired and hungry, almost broken-down when they reached the timber.

The truth was that old Red Tomahawk had yielded his command of the Sioux in the field to Snow Face, to whom as well as to the fair renegade, he owed his life when captured by the whites.

But though he had trusted the white chief, knowing him to be cunning and brave, he feared that the Renegade Queen would not be able to meet an emergency, and hence had sent the Wild Buffalo and three hundred braves as a better protection to her.

They had arrived almost broken down, both braves and ponies, and found the force of the Renegade Queen beaten off; but they were united, confident of victory, and so formed for a battle with the whites, whom they outnumbered as six to one.

Determined to encourage her warriors, for she knew she had a brave force to meet, though a small one, the Renegade Queen took the center of her line, and with Red Eagle near her to lend his aid and advice, she advanced to meet the coming force, but going slowly so as to have a reserve in the timber to retreat to, should the soldiers show a heavier force than now appeared, and which their boldness led her and the chief to believe they had.

Suddenly the carbines and rifles of the troopers and scouts poured a volley into the force of the Sioux, and warriors and ponies along the line dropped dead and wounded.

But the Renegade Queen noted the fact that no one fell very near to her, but to each side of her, some fifty or more feet away, the fire of the whites had been directed.

With wildest yells the Sioux pressed on, and were answered with a cheer from the soldiers, the war-cry of the Braves in Buckskin, and a terrible volley of bullets.

The line of red-skins swerved and staggered, but still held on, and the Renegade Queen saw that they were badly hurt.

The soldiers halted and gave another fire at long range, steadily and well aimed, and then drew their revolvers and the command came for a charge.

The red-skins must be checked, their line broken, or their entire strength would overwhelm the gallant little band.

This caused the Sioux to waver and halt, they preferring to meet the attack at a stand-still, and surround the whites.

But the Renegade Queen dashed forward with a cry, and they beheld her lance with its streamers going right down upon their foes, so with an appalling war-cry they too rushed on.

The young commander saw that his force must not be broken, or all were doomed.

He knew that he must hold his men solidly together to save them, if save them he could, and he at once took the same plan which Buffalo Bill had, and grouped his brave heroes to meet the attack.

The Sioux saw their advantage and began to circle around to entirely surround the pale-faces, and from Captain Fred Forrester to the humblest private, all felt that the chances were a hundred to one against them.

But just then, back in the timber from whence the soldiers had come, arose the loud and ringing notes of a bugle.

It was blowing a charge, and above the din of battle it was heard, while two horsemen dashed out of the timber, one waving his sword as to others to come on, the other the bugler, who still sent his wild notes for succor over the field.

CHAPTER XXX.

A STRANGER "CHIPS IN."

"In Heaven's name, what help is that?" cried Fred Forrester, as the bugle-notes reached his ears.

"The general relented, perhaps, and sent you the other two companies, sir," responded Captain Alfred Tabor of B company.

"Heaven grant it, for we need them; but help has surely arrived, for see there!"

Out of the timber now appeared horsemen from different points, turning their horses, darting about and waving their swords, as though ordering men into line.

At the same time a horseman, evidently a dispatch-bearer or officer, came riding like the wind down toward the soldiers at bay, waving his hat as he came.

This was too much for the red-skins, for the first blast of the bugle had checked their advance, and now they felt sure that a large force had come, or was near, coming to the rescue.

Their ponies, or those of Wild Buffalo's band, were broken down, and their riders almost used up as well, so they wished to retreat while they could, and the Red Eagle looked anxiously toward the Renegade Queen.

"Will my braves retreat from a foe?" she asked with sarcasm which the chief flinched under, for he read aright her smile of scorn.

"There may be more foes there than the Cruel Face has warriors, and to wait may be to lose her and all her braves with her.

"The Red Eagle is ready to die for the Cruel Face, but not to see her again among her people, who would kill her."

This settled it, and the Sioux retreated rapidly to the timber.

Nor did they halt there, for they knew that position could be flanked, might already be, as they could not see beyond the rise of prairie.

So they pressed on rapidly through the timber, crossed the plain to the ridge and disappeared beyond it, for out of the woods they had left they saw the troopers following, stretched out in a long line, and they felt sure that it was a large force upon their track, perhaps heavy enough to follow them to their village and threaten it with attack.

And the force which had thus turned the tide?

What was it?

Two men!

Only two and no more.

When the corporal and his four wounded returned to the timber, where they had left their pack-horses and servants under a guard of three men, they beheld there two persons who had just ridden up to the camp.

The first was a young man with a smoothly-shaven face, full of fearlessness and with a striking perfection of feature.

His hair was cut short, and clustered in curls about his temples, while his eyes were blue and very expressive, with a brightness about them that showed a spirit it would not do to arouse to anger.

He was dressed in a corduroy suit, which fitted well his fine form, wore top-boots, a belt of arms encircled his waist and a repeating-rifle hung at his back.

His face was shaded by a dove-colored slouch hat, and he rode well a fine large roan horse denoting both speed and endurance.

His companion was a Chinese, over six feet in height, with massive shoulders, and he was dressed in a suit of buckskin which gave him an odd appearance.

His pigtail was stuck into a pouch on the back of his blouse, and his head was surmounted by a broad-brimmed sombrero.

He, too, was well mounted, but he showed no belt of arms, yet a repeating-rifle was strapped to the saddle of a pack-horse which he led, and could be quickly brought into use if needed.

The appearance of these two in camp was a surprise to the soldiers and the servants.

But the white man said quickly:

"Are there other soldiers in reserve, corporal, to go to the aid of those gallant fellows?"

"I am sorry to say not, sir," responded the corporal, with marked respect, for there was something in the look and tone of the speaker to command it.

"Heaven help them, for there are more red-skins coming yonder, as I flanked them, and their force is larger than the one now engaged with the soldiers.

"We must do something to save them, corporal."

"What can we do, sir?"

The other corporal and his wounded comrades rode up at this minute, and they told most truly that the situation for the soldiers was growing desperate each moment.

"Men, you must let your wounds go, for awhile, and help me.

"It will be your only chance to save yourselves, for the defeat of your comrades means death to you also.

"Will you obey my orders?"

"Gladly, sir!" cried both corporals, only too glad to have a leader.

And the wounded men also rallied under the words and manner of the stranger.

"Then give me your bugle, my man, and one of you lend me a uniform-coat and hat."

And he appealed to the bugler, who was quite severely wounded.

The bugle was instantly handed to him, and Black Bird ran up with Surgeon Powell's fatigue coat and cap, saying, quickly:

"Take dese, sah, for dey belongs to my boss, and he's about your size, so dey'll fit yer, sah."

"I do not care for a fit just now, my man; but they will do well."

And in an instant the stranger had put on the coat and hat.

Then he wheeled his horse and, dashing to the edge of the timber, placed the bugle to his lips.

It only took a few notes to show that he was skilled in the use of the bugle, and he carefully noted the effect upon the red-skins and soldiers.

"Ah! that is well—all of you men who are able to mount do so, and ride to different points along the timber, showing yourselves and waving your swords, as though you were officers hurrying troops on.

The order was obeyed, and the edge of the timber soon presented a very animated scene, as the soldiers were doing all in their power to carry out the ruse of the gallant stranger, to deceive the red-skins, yes, and the soldiers, too.

"Bugler, make an effort and come down to me here," cried the stranger from where he was seated upon his horse.

The bugler was helped to his saddle by the Chinese and rode out to the stranger.

"Take the bugle and continue to blow the calls the best you can.

"Here, Chinese, come here with a rush!"

Out dashed the Chinese, and the order came:

"Ride to the end of the line and back again. Tell the corporal to come here, and then do you run back and forth as though carrying orders.

"Do you understand?"

"Allee samee likee 'Melican man, bossee," and away the Chinaman rode down the line, and the corporal soon appeared.

"Go back into the timber and I will come and give you this coat and hat, and you ride out and play commander, and the bugler will keep near you.

"I will come out at a run and then dart away like a courier to the command yonder, and have the soldiers also come back and forth."

"Yes, sir," and the corporal followed the stranger into the timber, the exchange was made of coat and hat, and the corporal rode back in full view of the Indians and soldiers.

Then the stranger went up to him at a run, halted an instant, and driving spurs to his horse dashed over the plain to the gallant band of soldiers who were wondering at the strange maneuvers in the edge of the timber and where the reinforcements had come from.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MYSTERIOUS RESCUER.

THE situation had suddenly changed for the soldiers, and they drew long sighs of relief, though they did not weaken in their determination to die in their tracks if need be.

The Indians were in full retreat, and the soldiers doggedly following them when the supposed courier dashed up.

Every eye was upon him, and not one seemed to know him.

He cast his eye over the party, signaled out the commandant and saluting politely said:

"I am sorry I have not to report reinforcements, sir, so please make the best of your favorable opportunity for retreat."

"Not to report reinforcements, sir?"

"Why, surely there are troops in yonder timber, but where from I cannot guess," said Fred Forrester, in surprise.

"There are only the few men you left there, and sent back wounded, excepting myself and my Chinese servant, sir."

"Do you mean this has all been a make-believe arrival of relief?"

"Yes, sir."

"Instigated by whom, sir?"

"I saw your desperate situation, sir, so made an effort to deceive the Indians by donning a uniform coat and hat loaned me by a negro, and also blowing the bugle calls, for I happen to know them."

"You deceived us as well, sir; but you are not a soldier, then?"

"No, sir."

"My name is Forrester, captain of A Company, —th Cavalry, and I am happy to meet you, sir, and thank you for your service, for I believe every man of us here owes his life to your presence of mind and daring," and Captain Forrester extended his hand, while the stranger grasped it with the remark:

"I am glad to feel that I have served you, sir."

"My name is Roy Rockland, and I am a gentleman at large, rover at will, and gambler by profession."

A smile crossed the face of Fred Forrester at this introduction of himself by the stranger, and he replied:

"I certainly am glad that your roving propensities brought you this way, Mr. Rockland; but permit me to present Surgeon Powell of Fort Fairview, Captain Tabor of the —th

Cavalry, and William Cody, chief of scouts, and better known as Buffalo Bill.

"My other officers I will present when they come up to us."

The stranger raised his sombrero, and then accepted the outstretched hands of the surgeon and scout, while he replied:

"I have knocked about the frontier some little, so of course know of Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon Scout, while the name of Captain Fred Forrester is by no means unknown to me."

"But permit me to suggest, sir, that you let those Sioux believe you intend a hot pursuit and really have reinforcements."

"Thank you for the suggestion, Mr. Rockland, and I will at once follow your advice."

This Captain Forrester did by sending Buffalo Bill, four scouts and Captain Tabor with his company to follow the red-skins for at least a mile or two, while with the others he removed his dead and wounded to the ridge where he had left his small reserve.

There were a couple of dozen dead and wounded Indian ponies on the field, and a number of animals unhurt feeding, or trotting about, and the remaining scouts were sent to rope them, or corral them, with the aid of half a dozen soldiers.

Surgeon Powell dashed on to the timber and soon established a temporary hospital, throwing off his coat and rolling up his sleeves for work as the wounded were brought in.

One of the lieutenants was ordered to take a few men and establish an outpost around the camp, while the other superintended the collecting of the wounded and afterward the burying of the dead.

As was their custom, the Sioux had carried off their dead and wounded as they fell, yet quite a number of fallen braves were found whom they could not bear away, or had not done so, owing to the fact that they had had no thought of having to retreat.

The party who went on the trail of the Sioux soon came upon a form lying in a thicket.

"It is a chief, and he is badly wounded, so I will send him back to Surgeon Powell," said Buffalo Bill, and he was placed upon a horse in front of a soldier who had orders to take him back to the timber.

In the mean time Captain Forrester had overlooked the situation, and finding that the position he occupied was a good one, with a brook of water near, and grass for the horses where they would not be exposed to a fire should the Sioux return, decided to remain there and send for reinforcements.

Many of his men were wounded, and notwithstanding the capture of a score of Indian ponies, he had not animals sufficient to mount his men.

Then, too, all needed rest, and he would not besides retreat in the face of the enemy, even though vastly outnumbered.

So axes and shovels were taken from the packs and a score of soldiers set to work to fell trees and throw up breastworks, so as to prepare against attack.

"We can then stand a siege for several days, and I must at once dispatch a courier for aid to the fort," he said.

"Permit me to offer my services, sir."

It was the stranger who spoke.

"But, sir, you have already done more than your share, and it will be a hard ride, for there is no time to lose."

"I am well mounted, Captain Forrester, as is also Chinese."

"I am on my way to Gold Pocket City, so permit me to be your courier."

"I will, thank you, Mr. Rockland, and will have my letter soon ready; but do you know the trail?"

"Oh, yes, I am a good plainsman and can find it readily."

"I will be ready by sunset."

"Take supper with me first, and then you will not have to halt—Ah! who is this?" and Fred Forrester turned as the soldier, sent from the advance, rode up with the wounded Indian, who was hardly more than conscious.

"Ho! Powell, here is a patient for you, and a chief: but I fear he is too far gone," called out Captain Forrester.

The Surgeon Scout advanced and said quickly:

"It is the Chief Red Eagle, a great leader, young as he is, among the tribes."

"I think he is weak from loss of blood, for I can see no serious wound."

"Take him to my wickiup yonder, men, for I owe to that red-skin my life, so must not let him die."

Half an hour after the strange horseman, followed by his Chinese servant, rode away from the camp bearing a letter from Fred Forrester to Colonel Cassidy, telling the situation they were in and asking for help.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DISPATCH-BEARER.

COLONEL CASSIDY had just finished a very enjoyable dinner at the home of Major Denton, where he often dined, for there he found most congenial company.

The major was a brilliant man, a thorough soldier, possessed rare judgment, and the colo-

nel always was glad to advise with him as to his command, for it will be remembered that the new commandant had not been long at his new post of duty.

Then Major Denton was a delightful host, told a good story, was an epicure and had only the best of wines, so fortunate was the officer who got the chance to place his legs beneath his mahogany.

Mrs. Denton was also a most charming hostess, and then there was her lovely ward, as she called Kate Kennerley, ever ready to do her share of the entertaining, for she sung divinely, accompanying herself upon the harp, guitar or piano, as the humor or pleasure of her guest suited, and she had many rare sketches, water-colors and scenes in oil, to show of her own handiwork.

So it was that the colonel quite often was glad to make the trio at the major's dinner-table a quartette by the addition of himself.

"A courier, sir, direct from Captain Forrester, and it is most important," said the major's orderly, entering the room where the four sat at dinner.

"Show him in here," said the major, not wishing his guest to be disturbed.

"I hope no bad news from Forrester, for I have reproached myself again and again for not allowing him to take the force he asked for," said the colonel.

"I trust nothing bad, colonel; but since Cody's courier arrived three days ago, we are all ready for an attack or an advance."

"Oh yes, I can send a large force to any point at half an hour's notice, and more, all the outposts are on the watch and ready; but here comes the courier."

As Colonel Cassidy spoke, the courier entered.

It was Roy Rockland, elegant in spite of his border costume, tall, dignified and handsome.

Behind him stalked Chinese close at his heels, and wearing a smile as bland as a deacon's.

There was that in the bearing of the stranger that stamped him as a gentleman, and both the colonel and major rose courteously, while the former said:

"Pardon me, sir, am I to understand that you are acting as a courier and have dispatches for me?"

It was well put and the stranger bowed, and bowing to the ladies, replied with a smile:

"You have expressed it, Colonel Cassidy, for I am acting as courier."

"Here is a letter from Captain Forrester, and it is most urgent, as you will see."

Colonel Cassidy at once seized the letter, while Major Denton said:

"Be seated, sir, or rather let me ask you to sit down and have a glass of wine with me."

"I am Major Denton, sir."

"My name is Roy Rockland, Major Denton, and—"

Just then Colonel Cassidy turned and grasped the hand of the stranger, while he said earnestly:

"Mr. Rockland, I am glad to know you, sir, and from my heart I thank you for your noble, splendid service to my officers and men."

"Listen to this, Denton," and ere the stranger could check him the colonel read aloud from the letter as follows:

"We owe, one and all of us, our lives to Mr. Roy Rockland, who kindly bears this to you."

"I found Cody and his scouts hemmed in by a large force under the Renegade Queen, and at bay, so rode to their rescue, when other red skins arrived and we had five hundred mounted Sioux to fight, and the result would have been our annihilation, but for the arrival of Mr. Rockland and his Chinese servant at our camp in the timber, where, with our wounded sent back, and servants, he led the Indians to believe large reinforcements for us were at hand and set them in rapid retreat."

"But of this Mr. Rockland will inform you, while I state that I have a force under Captain Tabor and Buffalo Bill making a feint of a pursuit of the red-skins, while the others in camp are throwing up works to stand a siege should the Sioux return when they discover we have had no help."

"My position is a good one, with plenty of grass near and water, and I shall make a strong fort of it by midnight, for Surgeon Powell reports a score of wounded men, some of whom cannot be removed, and the dead are eight soldiers and two scouts."

"May I ask for as many cavalry as you can spare, with a couple of pieces of artillery to be sent on with all dispatch, and as many infantry and two more guns to follow?"

"Of course I will be glad to have a superior officer relieve me of command, so pray do not consider me in the matter."

"Mr. Rockland will tell you of my exact position, and give you any further particulars, and let me again say that I have by no means exaggerated his valuable services to us all."

"Now you have heard what Forrester says, and we must send the troops at once, major."

"Yes, sir. Orderly!"

"Yes, sir."

"Ask Captain Roe, of my regiment, to report at once, and Lieutenant Germaine, of the —th Light Battery."

"What infantry will you send, Colonel Cassidy?"

"Five companies of the —th Infantry under Captain Ames."

"And I offer my services, sir."

"No; for I will not deprive that gallant fellow,

Forrester, of his command, and so send Roe and Ames, whom he ranks."

"True, sir; it would be cruel, although his letter expresses a willingness to yield the command," replied the major.

"It does, and more: no word or hint of a reproach at me for not allowing him to take a larger force."

"Four-score against five hundred!"

"How they must have fought, the brave fellows, and that boy, Forrester, is a tiger when aroused."

"He is indeed, Colonel Cassidy, for he risked all to save Buffalo Bill, and fought them back, advancing in the face of defeat."

"It was grand, sir, and I enjoyed it," said Rockland, with enthusiasm.

"Chinese man bossee great 'Melican man—no fraidee of degee," put in the Chinese, to the amusement of all except Rockland, whose face clouded, and he replied:

"I will retire now, sir, as Chinese reminds me that he has followed me into your presence."

"No; I will send Chinese to my quarters to be cared for, and you, Mr. Rockland, must be my guest, sir," said the colonel, quickly.

"Thank you, Colonel Cassidy, but I go on my way to-morrow, sir, and can look up quarters without inflicting myself upon you, and I would prefer it."

"May I ask why, sir?"

And the colonel looked slightly nettled.

"To be frank, sir, it is best that the commandant of Fort Fairview should not name as his guest a roving gambler, for I can lay claim to no other profession."

"Damn it, sir; I did not ask your profession or pedigree, but that you should be my guest, and as such I claim you," said the blunt old colonel.

And Mrs. Denton's laugh showed that he was forgiven the profanity he had given vent to, while she said, pleasantly:

"You must yield to the colonel, Mr. Rockland, or we will claim you as our guest, which perhaps we ought to do, as you are already beneath our roof."

"Thus urged, madam, I can but accept Colonel Cassidy's kind hospitality," said Roy Rockland in his courtly way, and he was given a seat at the table, his travel-stained appearance being excused, while Chinese went under an orderly's care to the quarters of the commandant.

Presented to the ladies, Roy Rockland at least showed that he was a courtly gentleman, whatever his present occupation might be, and in a modest way he told how he was riding across country with his Chinese servant, from an Overland station, and on his way to Gold Pocket City, when he espied the Sioux, and soon after the soldiers, so rode to the latter's camp and did what was in his power.

Just then Captains Roe and Ames entered, and a moment after Lieutenant Germaine of the artillery.

Captain Roe was ordered to take four companies of the —th Cavalry, and Lieutenant Germaine two pieces of his light battery, and go with all haste to the assistance of Captain Forrester, whose situation Roy Rockland explicitly gave.

Captain Ames was ordered to follow at once with five companies of his regiment and two more guns of Germaine's battery, and after a glass of wine to their success the officers departed and were soon pushing on hard to the rescue of the gallant Forrester and his men.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A WRECKED LIFE.

WHATEVER Roy Rockland might have proclaimed himself to be, he certainly showed that he had been well-born and reared as a gentleman.

Having accepted the situation as the colonel's guest, and seated himself at the table of Major Denton, he did not intend to be a drone in the hive, but to make himself as agreeable as possible.

He was handsome, beyond a doubt, and his face was a strong one as well, stamped with character it seemed capable of making him a different man than what he had proclaimed himself to be.

He was courtly in his manners, by no means forward, and seemed not to realize that he was in border riding costume at the table of the officer next in command of the fort, for Major Denton had been promoted to a lieutenant-colonelcy, although he had not received his official announcement of the fact.

The conversation, after the departure of the troops, naturally turned upon Forrester and his command, and the possibility of his being overwhelmed before reinforcements reached him.

"When did you leave the captain, Mr. Rockland?" somewhat anxiously Colonel Cassidy asked the question.

"Just before sunset, sir, of last evening."

"And you say he was near Bald Knob?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you have ridden very hard, for you left about six, and it is now just six, giving you twenty-four hours."

"I have good horses, sir, for the Chinese servant and myself," was the modest reply.

"Strangely good they must be, for you could not have halted often."

"I made three halts, sir, of an hour each, once at midnight, again at sunrise for breakfast, and at noon for dinner."

"Mr. Rockland, we owe you more than at first appeared, for you have not spared yourself, and besides you have had no rest."

"I am used to night-work, sir, and have a good frame for endurance; but your cavalry, leaving now, should reach Captain Forrester in thirty-six hours, if they do not spare horse-flesh."

"Which Roe will not do, for he will push on with what animals and men who can stand the run and leave the rest to follow."

"Yes, Captain Roe will be anxious to place Captain Forrester under some obligation to him, I take it."

It was the first time that Kate Kennerley had spoken, and it brought the eyes of the others upon her, those of Rockland with some surprise, for her tone was sarcastic.

The colonel smiled and turned:

"I think Roe regrets having misjudged Forrester, Miss Kate, and will be anxious to atone, as you say."

"Captain Ames and Lieutenant Germaine may be set down in the same category also, I think," was Kate Kennerley's response.

"Yes, I hardly think at one time that poor Forrester had any friends in the fort among the officers and their wives, except those present, although I must include Surgeon Powell and Cody."

"The soldiers, scouts and hangers-on believed him innocent to a man."

"They seemed to have had better powers of perception than those who are educated," and Kate appeared to enjoy the situation, until noticing that Roy Rockland was silent, remarked:

"Let me explain, Mr. Rockland, that one of our most gallant officers, Captain Forrester, in fact, was under a cloud, falsely accused by his former friends, though found guiltless by court-martial, and, afterward completely exonerated, allowed none of those who were his accusers to make amends for their conduct as far as admitting them to his former confidence and friendship."

"The three officers just sent to his relief were among those who became as it were his accusers and persecutors."

"I decidedly think that Captain Forrester is right in the stand he has taken, for it is only friendship that will withstand adversity and aspersions upon us that is worth claiming; but Captain Forrester is to be congratulated upon having so warm a friend as yourself."

Kate Kennerley flushed crimson at the words of Rockland, and to help her out of a position which she had brought upon herself, Mrs. Denton remarked:

"Yes, and Kate would be unworthy of the name of true womanhood did she not defend Captain Forrester, for once he saved her life, and at another time rescued her from kidnappers."

"In fact, Fred Forrester has only the warmest friends among all of us present; but when will Captain Ames and his infantry reach Bald Knob, colonel?"

"Ames will not spare his men, and as he takes a dozen ambulances along to give those who break down a lift, he should reach them within sixty hours."

"You think Forrester, if besieged, will be able to hold out so long, Mr. Rockland?"

"His position, sir, is this: and you can best judge for yourself."

"His camp is on a rise, on the apex of a rise, in thickly growing timber."

"Around him is an open plain on three sides, while the ridge slopes away on the fourth into a brook, fringed by trees."

"The brook has its rise in the rocks where his camp is, from springs, and he has felled a circle of trees, half an acre in size, and into which he can withdraw his cattle if attacked, while he is building a stockade, roofed over to protect his wounded and the horses."

"He has provisions on short rations for two days, and ample ammunition for a hard day's fight."

"For duty he has Buffalo Bill and five scouts, with sixty unwounded men of his own command, and perhaps some eight or ten of the wounded could help out in dire need."

"The Renegade Queen has perhaps four hundred and fifty mounted warriors, so they are about seven to one against the troops, and certainly can surround them and keep them besieged, but it will be hard for them to take them by assault, for Captain Forrester is as skillful as brave, and then, he has the aid of Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, which means a great deal, from all I have heard of the men."

"It is to be hoped, however, that the Renegade Queen will continue her retreat; but if not, she will make a grand effort to carry Fort Forrester."

"You are a born soldier, Mr. Rockland—were you ever one?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, sir. I was an officer under General Forrest in the Confederate Army; but the fortunes of war were against us, the inheritance I

expected would be mine was worthless with the freedom of the slaves, and so I spent a few thousands in seeing the world, as it were, and then turned—gambler!"

There was marked bitterness in the tone of the man who uttered the words.

It told of hopes blasted, ambition gone, and casting the die against Fate and accepting the alternative.

Mrs. Denton hastened to change the current of conversation, so said:

"Kate, will you not give us some music."

Without a word she arose, and running her hands across the harp-strings, from some motive, who can understand what, sung:

"Way down upon the Sewanee River."

Roy Rockland started, drew nearer, and as she began the chorus, joined her in a voice that was rich and full of sympathy to a marked degree.

"You should have gone on the operatic stage, Mr. Rockland—it is a pity you did not, for you have a rare voice," she said.

"Thank you. Yes; it is a pity I did not," he said, almost pathetically.

And he then joined her in several other songs.

At last Colonel Cassidy arose and escorted his guest to his home, and the two talked over Forrester's situation until a late hour.

"The force I have sent him will swell his command to nearly five hundred men, if not quite, so I hope they will be in time."

"I hope so sincerely, Colonel Cassidy."

And then Roy Rockland expressed his determination to go on his way the following morning.

All the urging of Colonel Cassidy was of no avail; he was set in his determination, and as Kate Kennerley looked from her window the following morning she beheld, to her surprise, the stranger and his Chinese companion leaving the fort.

"He would go, but left 'Good-by' for us with the colonel," said Major Denton, at breakfast, and Kate remarked, thoughtfully:

"Something has wrecked that man's life."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A WOUND AND A SCALP.

AFTER the departure of Roy Rockland from the camp on the ridge, Fred Forrester felt relieved, for he had placed his hope of aid in the hands of a man who, he did not doubt, would soon do his part of the work to bring help to him.

He had certainly done his share, and had the gratitude of every man in the command.

Then too his going did not take from his own force a single man, and this the officer was very glad of, for he felt that the trouble was not yet over.

It was well enough to have the red-skins retreating, for that gave him a chance to recuperate his force and also to fortify.

But Fred Forrester was too good an Indian-fighter not to know that the red-skins would soon discover that they had been deceived in the moment of trouble, and that what they had believed was another force, was simply a clever ruse and make-believe show of rescue.

This would infuriate them the more, and they would determine to overwhelm the force which they had so nearly had at their mercy in the morning.

Knowing this, Fred Forrester had told Captain Tabor not to push them close, and to be ready to retreat at a moment's notice.

Nor was he to let his men scatter to any great distance, and if the Indians halted to give battle, or to force him to show his strength, he was to return at once and leave Buffalo Bill and his scouts to watch their movements.

Captain Forrester was delighted at the chance he had to fortify, and kept every man hard at work, felling trees, throwing up dirt and building a hastily-constructed protection for the wounded, and the horses, if he was forced to bring them into his little fort.

Fortunately his position was at the very head of a brook, where a dozen springs gave forth clear and cool water, and this was a good thing for the wounded.

Surgeon Powell made his hospital in a secluded spot, and his patients were cared for skillfully and thoroughly, after which he left his soldier assistant in charge and sought to aid Captain Forrester.

The Red Eagle's wounds had been cared for as tenderly as though he had been the brother of the surgeon, and the chief had rallied and returned to consciousness, though he was very weak.

He recognized the Surgeon Scout and said in a low tone:

"The Red Eagle sees his white brother—why does he not kill me?"

"It is not my style, Red Eagle," replied the surgeon, in perfect Sioux.

"You were found wounded by my people and brought here, and I have cared for you, as it was my duty to do, even if I did not owe you my life, for I have not forgotten that you saved my life once when I sought your people

to urge them to bury the tomahawk, and they would have killed me."

"The Red Eagle must remain here and be quiet, or he will die of his wounds."

"And my people?"

"Have retreated with their Renegade Queen; but how was it the Red Eagle so nearly entrapped the scouts?" asked the surgeon, for he had not heard Buffalo Bill's story.

The chief told his story of having guided the Renegade Queen to the grave of her husband, and then trailed Texas Jack and his companion to the scouts' retreat, and how the Queen had played a decoy to capture them.

"Was any one with the Red Eagle?"

"No."

"Did he tell the Renegade Queen of the trail to the scouts' retreat?"

"The Red Eagle talks only when he has something to say," was the sententious response.

"So he alone knows of the retreat, and the trail there?"

The chief nodded, and as the Surgeon Scout gave him a sleeping potion and walked away, he muttered:

"Then Bill's secret is safe, for before the Red Eagle gets well he will have accomplished his purpose in hiding there, I guess; but it was a close call for Cody and his band."

When he joined Captain Forrester, it was just as Rockland was departing, and soon after the young officer showed the surgeon all that he had done to fortify.

"It is just like you, Fred, and if they do turn on us, which I am sure they will do, we can stand them off for two or three days at least."

"Did you send for any stated number of troops?"

"No, I put the situation as it was, with my reduced force, and the strength of the Sioux, with perhaps another column of them yet to hear from, so left it to the colonel to send what he deems best, and, as he may regret not letting me have more, he will doubtless send several hundred now, with Major Denton, or Major Merton, to command them."

"I'll bet a horse he does not relieve you, and I would feel he had wronged you if he had."

"You mean by sending a ranking officer?"

"Certainly."

"Well, he may not; but I wrote him not to consider me in the matter."

"Just your way, old fellow; but yonder comes Cody."

It was growing dark, but both officers suddenly beheld the chief of scouts dash out of the timber and come rapidly on toward the fort.

As he rode into the inclosure he called out:

"I got a nip in the arm, Frank, and as it bleeds freely, Captain Tabor sent me back as courier, for he wished to report, Captain Forrester, that the Sioux had halted to make a stand, evidently discovering his weakness, and that he will retreat rapidly after dark, leaving Texas Jack and two others of my men to watch the red-skins."

"It is what I expected, Bill; but we will be ready for the red-skins when they return, and our gallant stranger rescuer has already gone to the fort with a letter asking for reinforcements."

"But you did catch it, did you not?"

And Captain Forrester glanced anxiously at the wound on the scout's arm, which the surgeon was already examining.

"You were in close quarters, Bill, for this is a knife-thrust," said Frank Powell.

"Yes; I ran in on several of them, and Chief Panther Eye gave me this reminder."

"And Panther Eye?" laconically asked Fred Forrester.

"Has struck the trail for the happy hunting-grounds."

"I don't often take a scalp, but his hangs to my saddle yonder."

"How about it, Frank?"

"It is not serious, though the point of the knife touched the bone."

"Keep your arm in a sling for a few days and keep in camp, for Jack can see to the Sioux movements and I can help him."

"No; you don't leave camp, Powell, for you are too valuable just now as a surgeon to turn you into a scout."

"Jack can do Cody's outside work, and he can help me here," responded Captain Forrester, and the wounded arm having been dressed, the three friends sat down to supper just as the shadows of night fell upon the scene.

CHAPTER XXXV.

TENDERFOOT TOM WRITES A LETTER.

"By the way, Bill, in the excitement of the day I forgot to tell you that I had a letter for you," said Captain Forrester, as the two sat smoking together after supper, while Surgeon Powell had returned to look after his wounded men.

"A letter for me, captain?" asked the scout, with some surprise, and he held forth his hand for the letter, which the officer took from his pocket with the remark:

"Yes; it came some days ago to the fort,

brought by Rainbow Rob, and the colonel asked me to hand it to you."

Buffalo Bill took the letter and laughed.

It was folded in the shape of a cocked hat and sealed with flour-paste, while the address it bore was in a very remarkable style of writing and as follows:

"Fer

"BUFLER BILL,
"Chief o' Skoutz
"At Fort Farvu.

"By ther kind hand o'

"RAINBO ROB."

Buffalo Bill smiled as he read the odd address, and, tearing open the missive, read the contents, and which I here give to the reader.

It was guiltless of address or date:

"BUFLER BILL,
"DEER PARD,
"SUR—

"I takes my penn in my grip ter rite yer a fu lins akordin ter my plege ter yer-self, bein as I is yer pard now an ferever more amen on akcount o yer savin me from ther rope fer my misdeskreptions.

"I sed as how I'd go full honist with yer an I do; see ef I dont.

"So hear goes ter tel yer what hev gone on sin I seen yer last, an I rites yer ter ther fort same as yer tole me an sends it by Rainbo Rob, who are a squar man an ther best driver on ther Overlan ceptin you.

"Now Pard Bill I has ter report that a women went threw on ther last herse bound west.

"She were a dandy from Waybak an drest ter kill in a soot o Mexikia close.

"She were bound ter Gole Poket Cittey, an sed she were goin thar ter remain.

"She had bagage ter throw to ther birds, it were so noomrous, and she wore shootin irons ter kill, with maybee haf a dozen bowie-knives in her belt.

"Thar was more in ther herse, but none I knowd an none ter interest you, Pard Bill.

"Rainbo Rob when he come back sed as how ther herse was held up not far away by three o ther Gold Grabbers o ther Rokies, for he knowd em havin druv thar afore he comed here.

"But ther Lightnin' Leddy in ther herse jist lit out an kivered ther chief an tuk him in while Rob he shooted one o tothers and driv over ther third.

"Ther chief he jumped from ther herse top inter ther river at ther cliff afore reachin Gole Poket, an got away; but tother were left ter repare damages so he cud be well when they hangs him.

"Ther women she stopped at ther Roost an jist ordered ther best an got it.

"She writ her name, so Rainbo says, as Bowie Knife Bess, ther Gal Sport, an I guesses she haint far wrong.

"Now thets all I knows of her, an Rainbo says he'll tell me more ef he gits noos, an he is ter make a seprat run over ter fort Farvu an will take this letter to yoo.

"Now Pard Bill thar are another gerloot ter rite yer about.

"He passed hear on Sundy ther Sabbuth Day, which it are rekommended ter keep wholly.

"He were not alone fer ther were with him a Chine nigger as big as Bruiser Bill whose toes yer hed ter tarn up at Golden ter pervent his doin a like faver fer yerself, an he were six feet four.

"This yaller Chinee are jist as big, an he do look dangersome.

"He are the sarvint o ther gen, an do call him Bossee; but I does not think he are as big a fool as he looks, for Chinee folks is develish sly.

"Ther gent are one clean through, but he do look like one who cud fight an enjoy it.

"He were well armed, an well heeled and drest in velvit an they hed a pack horse, an the horses were fust class.

"Ther gent got me ter give em dinner an he give me a ten fer it, so I knows he be a gent.

"He sed as how he was a Gambler fer a livin, but he do look that solum he made me think o sayin let us pray.

"He sed as how they was goin ter Gole Poket, but wood hunt along ther traies an enjoy life as they went along, an he sprung some latin or Hebroo on me—maybe it were Chinee.

"Now yer knows all I hes ter tel yer, so hopin these few lines may find you well, I is

"Allus yer Pard

"TENDERFOOT TOM."

Contrary to the expectation of Fred Forrester, who saw the scout smile after he had read this remarkable letter, Buffalo Bill made no comment upon it, but said, quietly:

"I hope we will get reinforcements so as to give these Sioux a severe thrashing, for I must go to Gold Pocket City as soon as I can get away."

Something in Tenderfoot Tom's epistle had decided Buffalo Bill in making his decision to visit Gold Pocket City.

Ere comment could be made by Captain Forrester, the sound of hoofs was heard coming through the darkness, followed by a sharp challenge from the sentinel.

"Tabor and men of the —th Cavalry," came the response, and a moment after that officer came up to the quarters of Fred Forrester with the remark:

"I regret to report, Captain Forrester, that the red-skins discovered that they had been deceived and are returning."

"We will give them a warm welcome; but sit down, Tabor, and have some supper," was the calm response of Fred Forrester, whom no peril could disconcert.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DEVIL DICK VISITS GOLD POCKET CITY.

THERE was a man who visited Gold Pocket City now and then, who was known to be a

character so desperate that the bravest men shunned him, and cared not to face him even with odds.

He went by the name of Devil Dick, and his brute strength was known to be marvelous, while he was quick as a panther in his movements, though a very large man.

Whenever he came to Gold Pocket, he left one or more newly-made graves as a souvenir of his visit, and such was the reputation he had along the entire line of mines.

If he had ever met his match, the fact was unknown, but that he had been in some desperate encounters many could take oath on.

Indeed, his personal appearance indicated this, for there was a deep scar along his left cheek which extended to the back of his neck, and one nostril of his nose had a slit in it, while a round hole in his right ear indicated that a bullet had cut through there.

A slice had been also taken off of his chin, and across his throat was a gash as if he had at some time very nearly had it cut from ear to ear.

On his forehead was another scar, left by a bullet, and two fingers of his left hand were missing.

What scars he had on his body and limbs no one knew, but he said that he had been shot and slashed some forty times, and if his face was a criterion for the rest of his frame, there was no reason for doubting his word.

Devil Dick's hair was red, and he went clean-shaven as though proud of the scars his face could show.

His neck was short and thick, his shoulders herculean, and his arms long and knotted with muscles.

He stood firm on his feet, which, like his hands, were enormous, and his form was clad in a red woolen shirt, black pants, and a sombrero, the brim of which hung down around his neck, but was pinned up in front with a miniature representation of Mephisto in coral, thus advertising his name of Devil Dick.

The man was an itinerant gambler, roaming from camp to camp, and making the rounds every two months.

People did not dare refuse to play with him if invited, or to win if they did, so he was always in funds and gold seemed to be his god.

What he did with his money no one knew, but he had been heard to say that he intended to win enough gold to make up for his evil looks, and could then go East and marry a girl he had always loved.

One fellow had foolishly asked him one night over a game of cards:

"But does she love you, Dick?"

"Why?"

"Well, I wondered if she could, if, as you say, she is a beautiful girl."

"I shall ask her to love me and marry me, and if she refuses I will do with her just what I intend to do with you for insulting me."

"What is that?"

"Kill you," and he shot the man dead where he sat, threw his body one side and continued his game.

He never rode horseback, always went on foot, wearing moccasins and carrying a knapsack and a pair of blankets strapped upon his back.

These he never went without, and he was always ready for a tramp, carrying his worldly belongings with him.

If he had any friendships no one knew whom it was he honored with his preference, unless it was Bravo Ben in Gold Pocket, who had once saved him from a band of Vigilantes who were on his track to hang him for killing a woman in one of the camps who had jeered him.

And this was the character who walked into Gold Pocket one afternoon, and halted as he heard his name called from a cabin, one of the first ones in the settlement.

"Hello, Ben, it's you, is it."

"Come on up to the Roost with me," called back Devil Dick from the trail, where he halted, staff in hand.

"No, pard, I are used up, so come by an' see me."

Devil Dick at once ascended to the cabin and found Bravo Ben there alone, his two arms in slings.

"Hello, been tackling a grizzly, Bravo, and got chewed up a bit?"

"Yas, a she tiger, and a bad one."

"It were a woman did this," said Bravo Ben savagely.

Devil Dick laughed, a hoarse, unpleasant, mocking laugh.

"You may grin, but it are so."

"A woman?"

"Yas."

"A man in a woman's outfit?"

"No, a mere gal."

"The deuce!"

"Thet's what she are."

"In Gold Pocket?"

"Yas."

"Where is she?"

"At Gambler Gaul's cabin at the Roost."

"I heard Gambler Gaul had been hanged."

"So he was, for he turned out to be Captain Brimstone."

"They had it that way in the lower camps;

but how was it, for you know I have not been round to Gold Pocket for some time?"

"Oh, he jist played two games, thet o' Gambler Gaul, and Brimstone, and Bufler Bill took his trail, played ther Deserter Sergeant and roped him in."

"Swung him up?"

"No, he died o' bullet fever."

"Buffalo Bill is a dandy."

"He are, and maybe some day he'll tackle you."

"Maybe he will; but I'll be there, Ben."

"Now to your having been carved up this way."

"Who is she?"

"She calls herself ther Leddy Sport."

"Ah! gambler?"

"Yas."

"Any other name?"

"Yas, Bowie-knife Bessie."

"I see, and she uses a knife?"

"Don't you see she does?"

"Look at me."

"Yes, and now where is she?"

"Up at ther Roost as I said, and the new landlord is dead gone on her, all ther boys think she's an angel and she's jist got Gold Pocket as she wants it."

"I must make her acquaintance, for I gamble a little, myself," and the desperado laughed in a quiet, threatening way, while Bravo Ben said in a low, earnest tone:

"I has a favor to ask o' you, Devil Dick."

"Granted," was the ready reply, and the face of Bravo Ben grew malignant with hatred at the quick reply of the desperado whom all so greatly feared.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DEVIL DICK TAKES A CONTRACT.

"PARD, it are just what I wants yer ter do, ter meet her, for I has done so," said Bravo Ben, wincing with pain physically and also at the remembrance of the meeting.

"So I see," was the dry rejoinder of Devil Dick, who, whatever his other faults did not affect the dialect of the border when he knew how to speak differently:

Then he added:

"But the favor you wished to ask of me, Ben?"

"I has a call on yer, hasn't I?"

"You have, for I owe you my life."

"Waal, I wants ter hev yer cancel ther debt."

"I'll do it if you will only tell me how."

"Does yer want any dust?"

"I always want gold."

"Yer'll git it, for I'll pay yer well fer ther work I wants yer ter do."

"See here, Ben," and the eyes of the desperado glistened.

"You wish me to do you a favor?"

"I does."

"You reminded me that I owed it to you?"

"Yas, yer does."

"I told you once that whenever I could do you a good turn I would."

"Thet's what yer said."

"Well, what in thunder do you talk about money to me for?"

"I want gold, yes, and I'll always get it, in whatever manner suits me, for gold I am bound to have; but if you hint about paying me I'll break every bone in your body, and thus do you a favor by preventing the hangman from taking you out of life."

Bravo Ben was positively frightened, for the face of the desperado was livid and his eyes were wicked and menacing in the extreme.

"All right, pard; but I wanted yer ter git some gold as well as settle up ther old debt yer owes me for yer life."

"If it's a case of divide, yes; but if it is to have you pay me, no."

"Now what is it you wish done?"

"Did you ever kill a woman?"

The question came so pat, it was so unexpected, that the desperado started as though he had been shot at.

And more, his face changed color rapidly and his features moved.

"What's the matter, Dick?"

Instantly the man became calm.

He certainly had command over himself to a wonderful degree.

Then he remarked in a careless tone:

"You ask me if I have ever killed a woman?"

"Thet's what I asked yer."

"I have."

"Ther deuce! then yer won't be squeamish about killing another?"

"I told you that when I went East, with plenty of gold to give one woman all that she could covet in the world, and she refused to marry me, if my gold would not be a balm for my hideous looks and warped nature, then I meant to kill her."

"If I could kill her, whom I love, why, then, I can kill any other woman without a pang of remorse."

"Do you understand?"

"I do."

"Now, what is it that you want done?"

"I wants a woman killed."

"The one who wounded you?"

"Yas."

"Tell me of her and of your affair with her."

This Bravo Ben did, making it all out in his favor.

"Ther boy, yer see—they calls him Jarsey—waal, he has struck it rich, and I knows whar his find is, and maybe he tuk ther woman thar, for he hev been ridin' horseback with her several times, and as she saved his life, fer I meant ter kill him, why, he's dead gone on her of course."

"Now, if ther boy goes under, and ther woman, too, you and me gits his find, and you has ther pleasure o' payin' ther debt o' deep gratitude you owes me."

"There you go again, Ben, about my debt of life to you; but all right; it is your nature, and there's an old saying that you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

"I was born a gentleman, Ben, strange as it may seem to you, but I went wrong, and when I shot at a man who insulted me, I killed his mother; by accident, it is true, but it was a woman's life all the same."

"Well, I loved a little girl, who never knew me as I was in my evil life, and I had to leave her, for no one was aware that I was the murderer, but all would have been proven had I remained."

"I came West to hunt gold, for I was poor, and I've got it, too."

"Whar, pard?"

"That is none of your darned business; but I've got it, and I got this, and this, and others in my hunt for it."

And he touched almost savagely the scars on his face and hands.

"Now tell me what you wish done, and I'll do it."

The man had spoken in a low, earnest tone, and he seemed to be deeply moved the while, but once more was himself again as he now turned to Bravo Ben.

"Well, go up to Poker Hall ter-night, and git in with ther woman."

"You kin raise a row with some man, an' in ther fuss jist let her have it."

"As fer ther boy, we kin settle him arterwards, onless yer sees yer chance ter throw a bullet inter him too."

"Does yer understand, Devil Dick?"

"I do, and I'll be off, for I wish to get to the Roost for supper."

"I has a pard I eats with over yonder, as I can't do nothin', and you is welcome."

"No; I accept no man's hospitality, but pay for all I get."

"I'll let you hear from me again when I have paid the life debt I owe you."

"Yer hain't mad, Pard Dick?"

"Yes, I have been mad for ten years; good-by," and the desperado walked away from the cabin and wended his way on up the valley.

Those who saw him shook their heads ominously and said:

"Devil Dick is in camp, so thar will be music to-night up at Poker Hall."

Landlord Bony saw him enter the hotel and cast a very queer glance at him.

Of course he did not like his appearance, for who could, and he was half-tempted to refuse him quarters, just on his looks, when in a pleasant voice and polite manner, wholly different from what he had expected, the desperado said:

"Good-evening, landlord."

"I wish to put up with you, if you please."

"Certainly; please register."

If the landlord had thought his guest could not write, he was quickly undeceived, for in a delicate, almost feminine hand, he wrote:

"DEVIL DICK,

"America."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A WOMAN'S HATE.

In her retreat before the troopers the Renegade Queen was closely watching the situation.

She rode ahead, and glass in hand, would often turn her horse and glance back over the scene.

The Red Eagle was in command of the rear, so she felt no fear of being overpressed, for she had every confidence in that young chief.

But suddenly a warrior dashed up with word that the Red Eagle was missing.

He had been either killed or captured, for he had last been seen to ride alone into a thicket.

The Renegade Queen bit her lips somewhat nervously.

She had relied so completely upon the Red Eagle.

Then she called to Panther Eye and bade him go back and see if the Red Eagle could be rescued.

The chief was glad to obey, and rushed back with an earnestness that sent him almost into the midst of the troopers.

In fact he went a trifle too far, with the score of warriors at his back, for Buffalo Bill saw him and dashed right in among his braves.

He knew the Panther Eye as a cruel and bitter foe to the whites, and one who several times

had prevented the burying of the tomahawk between his people and the pale-faces.

So Buffalo Bill took his chances with death to capture or kill the Panther Eye.

His magnificent horse carried him like a thunderbolt in among the group of braves, and ponies and riders went down.

Texas Jack and several other scouts followed close, and Captain Alfred Tabor joined in the hand-to-hand conflict.

It lasted but a moment, but in that moment Panther Eye lost his life and scalp at the hands of Buffalo Bill, and a dozen warriors went down, while as many ponies were captured.

It was a victory for the pale-faces, and hastened the red-skins in their retreat.

Then word went to the Renegade Queen.

But she had seen it all with her glass, and she was in a furious mood.

Instead of the recapture of the Red Eagle, the Panther Eye had lost his life.

But the glass of the Renegade Queen also showed her that in the midst of the fracas the troopers had pressed more rapidly forward and shown their weakness.

They were not fresh troops, this she saw, but the same whom she had before fought.

She had seen Buffalo Bill kill the Panther Eye and take his scalp.

This was doubtless the way the Red Eagle had gone, back in the timber, was suggested to her mind.

The scout, her foe, still lived.

Her glass also showed her Captain Alfred Tabor and Texas Jack, for she had before noted these on the field.

If reinforcements had come, why had they not been sent in pursuit?

Then she looked back beyond the mere handful of troopers.

No one else was visible. There was no other force pursuing.

Something was moving surely, and as she was not being hot pressed she would call a halt.

Riding upon a higher rise of the prairie, she looked back over the country.

She saw the distant timber where the troopers had gone into camp.

Her glass was a powerful one, and as the soldiers did not know she had it, they had no fear of being seen at that distance.

But she did see them, she saw trees being cut down in the timber and men at work with spades and shovels.

This showed weakness on the part of the enemy.

They were fortifying against attack, and that showed they feared it.

Some clever ruse had sent the Indians off in retreat.

So the Renegade Queen took advantage of the situation, and decided to make her power felt.

She sent for her other chiefs and said to them that she was sure that no other troops had come.

The Great Spirit gave her power to see further than they did, so they must halt.

The halt was made and a bold front put on and this checked the pursuit and soon after sent the troopers back to cover, as had been their order.

Texas Jack and two other scouts were left to watch the movements of the enemy.

Then the Queen said that she knew that the pale-faces were fortifying their camp.

They were but a handful, and they must be surrounded in the night and at dawn attacked.

They had killed the Red Eagle and the Panther, and nearly half a hundred of her warriors had been slain or wounded, with as many ponies as well.

In the pale-face camp were their foes, scouts and soldiers.

There was the man, Buffalo Bill, who had slain the great white chief, Snow Face, and the men who had massacred the warriors with him were also there.

Let them take the little fort and a hundred scalps would hang at their belts, and the pale-face settlers would fly from their country back toward the rising sun.

The Long Hair would be captured alive and tortured to death, and all the Sioux in their village would rejoice.

Such was the way the cunning woman talked, and she aroused her hearers to the wildest pitch of fury.

She had come to hate her own race, and she was cruelly revengeful against Buffalo Bill.

Hating, she meant to kill, to be merciless.

Then she called to her a young warrior and told him to go with all speed to the signal-mountain.

This would save him a ride of a day, and he must signal for more warriors.

"Burn five smokes," she said, for she knew that this would bring her five hundred more warriors.

He was to go to the signal-mountain, upon which the eye of a red-skin sentinel at the village was constantly kept.

He would send up one smoke, that is, let the dense smoke of a smothered fire ascend for a minute.

Then he would wait to see if a smoke curled up from the lookout post in the mountains.

If so, he was to send up his smoke again, then smother it, and so on until five separate columns of smoke had gone heavenward.

Half an hour after they were reported in the village there would be five hundred warriors on the war-trail, going to join their Renegade Queen.

She had started out on a raid merely to capture Buffalo Bill, but circumstances were shaping affairs so that she would make it a war, and with a thousand warriors at her back she would send up a wail of anguish from fort, mining-camp and settlement that would long be remembered.

The Renegade Queen, in her woman's hatred and revenge, was going mad, and woe be unto those who felt her cruel blows.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN SUSPENSE.

CAPTAIN ALFRED TABOR returned to the camp and made his report.

He was glad to see that Captain Forrester had neglected nothing, and felt relieved to note the defenses already thrown up.

"You have sent back for reinforcements, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; by our stranger friend, and he will go at full speed."

"Then we can hold them off, for a few days at least."

"How did you discover that they meant to return?"

"Texas Jack sent me word that with his glass he had seen the Renegade Queen watching the situation, and that she too had a glass."

"Then she took in everything."

"Most certainly, for the halt was made by the red-skins soon after Jack's report came."

"When Buffalo Bill here made his grand dash upon Panther Eye and scalped him, I had my men come up for fear of a surround, and the Queen doubtless noted the fact and saw our weakness."

"At any rate she came to a halt, threw out her scouts, and obeying your orders, Captain Forrester, I drew off my men under cover of the darkness, and returned."

"You did well, Captain Tabor; but you left Texas Jack and two others behind."

"Oh, yes, sir."

"If they make a move Jack will get it down fine, you may be sure," said Buffalo Bill.

"I feel that he will; but did you suffer much, Captain Tabor?"

"Lost one poor fellow killed and three wounded, with half a dozen horses."

"I had to press them, you know, to make believe we were in earnest."

"Ah, yes; and you were fortunate to lose no more."

"The wounded I sent on to Powell's quarters, and brought the dead soldier back to save his scalp— Ah! there goes a challenge."

As Captain Tabor spoke the sentinel out on the prairie, a couple of hundred yards from the timber, was heard to call out sternly:

"Halt! who comes there?"

The response was not heard, but it was evidently satisfactory, for a minute after a horseman came riding through the gloom at a canter.

"It is Scout Buck, for I know his style of riding," Buffalo Bill said, and a minute after the horseman halted at the quarters of the young commander.

"Well, Buck, what news from the front?" asked Captain Forrester.

"The reds have halted, picketed their horses and are having a grand pow-wow, cap'n, with that fiend of a woman for head devil, and my idea is that they take the trail leading this way before dawn."

"But Jack sent me to tell you that he is going off on a little trail all his own."

"He got onto a little scene, where the Renegade Queen was giving orders to a warrior, and Jack knew him as one of the Sioux couriers, so he is going after help, either to the village or to some other column."

"Texas Jack noted the course he took, and followed, so sent me back to report and ask Chief Cody to send Nelse out to take his place, and also to say that half a dozen scouts wouldn't be a man too many to watch those red devils."

"All right, Buck, I'll send Nelse and three others back with you, and you must divide forces and keep your eyes well open," said Buffalo Bill.

"You bet we will, for closed eyes this night won't open in the morning," was the significant reply.

"I am sorry Jack went off on that courier's trail, and yet he knew, and it may be will pan out for the best."

"Get your supper, Buck, while I look up the boys to return with you," and Buffalo Bill went over to where the scouts had their camp.

Ten minutes after five Braves in Buckskin rode away from the little fort and went back to join the one brave fellow then between the troops and their red foes.

"Well, Cody, we are in for it," said Fred Forrester tranquilly, after the Chief of Scouts returned from seeing his Braves in Buckskin depart for the front.

"Yes, sir, without doubt."

Frank Powell just then came up and joined the group, for Captain Tabor, and the two lieutenants, Ned Ford and Evans Rolston were also at headquarters, Fred Forrester having sent for them to join him there. Whatever the feeling in the past might have been, which Captain Tabor and Lieutenants Ford and Rolston held against Captain Forrester, they knew now that it had been unjust and wished to make every reparation in their power.

Besides they had seen his splendid pluck that day, his skill and coolness, and they felt the most perfect confidence in his ability to pull through if any man could.

They knew that Forrester, Powell and Cody were the warmest friends, and that they were outsiders, as it were; but they were now all in the same boat, so to speak, and it was sink or swim together, and Fred Forrester was the helmsman upon whom all depended.

So the six men chatted together pleasantly, as though no fearful ordeal was before them, no death-ax hung over their head.

Between them and a ruthless foe were the six scouts, and the chain of soldier outposts around the little timber fort.

Surgeon Powell reported that there would be for duty in a fight seventy-six men all told, with Cody and six scouts, so that they knew they would have to fight about eight to one.

Yet not a face blanched, not a nerve quickened with fear.

They all awaited the dread ordeal, officers and men, and as dawn began to brighten the east it came, for the sentinel soldiers challenged sharply all around the line, and the six scouts came in, the soldiers with them, and red-skins were a moment after rushing to the attack.

CHAPTER XL.

TEXAS JACK ON THE TRAIL.

TEXAS JACK had won fame under the "Bonnie Blue Flag," now forever furled, as a soldier and a scout, and afterward on the Texan prairies he had become a noted trailer and ranger.

Having drifted up to the Northern plains and become the trusted and tried pard of Buffalo Bill, his name soon spread along the frontier as a scout of wondrous skill and daring.

When he saw the Renegade Queen in council with the chiefs and beheld the Sioux courier sent for, he knew that the latter was to be sent off on some mission.

What could that mission be but for help?

His glass revealed the group, and he knew the courier from his style of dress, and that he was, with his horse, stripped for a rapid run.

"I'll follow him," decided Texas Jack.

And dropping back to where Scout Buck was, he told him of his intention and sent word to Buffalo Bill, his chief.

Then he returned to his position and saw the courier flying away down the slope of prairie toward a stream.

"He follows that to the valley, and will keep it to Signal Mountain.

"That's his little game, and I'll go, too."

With that Texas Jack slipped around the end of the red-skin line, and, it being night now, cut across until he came to the head of a small valley.

"He has gone through here, for he could not cross the ridge without going far around.

"Now, Rascal, show your instinct and take the scent of that Injun and his pony."

The intelligent horse seemed to understand his master, and gave a snort, as though scenting the air.

Then, given the rein, he moved on up the valley, his head bent low like a hound on the trail.

"Ah, you're a trailer, you are, old Rascal, for you have struck it sure, and I have only now to let you have your way," muttered the scout.

And on the horse went at a swinging walk.

Every hour or so he would be halted for a short rest, and then once more keep on his way.

An hour before dawn the scout drew rein at a brook, watered his horse, took off the saddle and bridle, and staked him out, after which he threw himself down to rest.

The horse fed for half an hour and then lay down and went to sleep, lying flat out so as to completely rest his limbs.

He seemed to comprehend that he followed a long trail.

He was a dark roan, with black mane and tail, and splendidly formed for speed and bottom.

Dawn came, and as the east grew rosy the horse awoke and gave a low whinny.

Instantly Texas Jack was upon his feet, and while he was eating his breakfast, of a cracker and slice of cold deer-meat, the horse indulged in some mouthfuls of the dew-laden grass.

Then Texas Jack began to look for a trail, and he gave a low whistle as he said:

"He's gone along since dawn, for the dew has been knocked off.

"We camped pretty near together last night, Pard Injun."

Rascal was soon saddled and mounted and held on the trail, the scout congratulating himself that he had passed the red-skin unseen in the night and had also been passed by him in the early dawn.

It was ten o'clock when Texas Jack left his horse and ascended a hill on foot.

At the summit he glanced around him, and some ten miles away he saw Signal Mountain.

He knew that from its summit the Sioux could signal by a column of smoke to the mountains, fifty miles away.

He felt that he was right, that the Sioux courier had come there to signal for more warriors.

Calmly he waited and watched, and in half an hour after his coming, with his glass turned upon Signal Mountain, he saw a dark smoke going up in a column from the spot where he now knew the Indians to be.

The smoke continued to ascend for some minutes and then ceased.

The scout waited with the utmost patience.

He knew all the Indians' signs and signals.

It was a still day and the smoke went straight upward, so could be seen as far as the eye could reach, and the vision of a red-skin trained to signaling, could see a very long way off.

At length another column of smoke ascended, but only for a minute, when it was shut off.

"One," said Texas Jack.

Then, after a couple of minutes or so, a second column of smoke went up.

"Two."

Another pause, and a third ascended.

"Three."

Then again a rest, and up curled the fourth column.

"Ah! Four! The Renegade Queen wants four hundred braves!"

Another rest, and a fifth column soared heavenward.

"Five! Can she wish more?"

"It means that she intends the worst kind of devilment."

"No, that is all, and God knows they are enough."

"Now, that red-skin will wait yonder at the base of Signal Mountain to guide the braves to the Renegade Queen."

"At least, I think so, but must find out."

"Then I can strike to the westward along the ridge and must head off the reinforcements which Captain Forrester sent for."

"There will be enough to divide, so we can ambush those fellows and have a force between the renegade and her village, so when the others are beaten we can make it rather hot for the Sioux."

"Now to locate that Indian, and I only wish I could start him for the happy hunting-grounds, but I cannot do that, for he is to be the guide for those coming."

"Fortunately I can head the force off that has been sent for to the fort."

So saying the scout descended the hill, left his horse in clover, so to speak, and went on foot toward Signal Mountain, going at a fast Indian trot.

"I can rest while riding, and Rascal must have his rest now," he said.

In less than two hours he was at the base of Signal Mountain, and scouting with the greatest caution, saw the red-skin's pony hidden in a thicket, and his saddle and blankets near.

"He is off on a hunt, so will remain."

"This is all I want to know," and he started on the back trail, keeping up the same tireless trot that carried him back to his horse in less time than he had before made the ten miles.

"Rascal, you have had just six hours' rest, plenty to eat and must go."

"Be off, old fellow," and leaping into his saddle he set off at a canter.

It was late in the afternoon, and he pushed on until night, when he rested for a couple of hours and again held on.

Just after dawn he drew rein suddenly, for a horseman was before him, not two hundred yards away, and from his lips broke the words:

"Buffalo Bill!"

CHAPTER XLI.

TAKING DESPERATE CHANCES.

It was very evident that the Sioux supposed, with the withdrawal from the feigned pursuit, Captain Tabor had taken the scouts with his soldiers, and that there was nothing to be feared between them and their point of attack.

But the Braves in Buckskin worked quietly and with skill, and cunning as were the red-skins, they were more so.

Though unseen by the Sioux, they had their eyes on their movements; and as they began to stretch out on either wing, to surround the foes in the timber, the scouts divided and held on around with them.

Thus, when the circle of death was complete around the little fort, and the red-skins lay half a mile off, waiting for the time to attack, the scouts were between them and their prey, also surrounding the timber, though far apart from each other.

Within the circle of scouts was another of soldiers, close in toward the camp, and thus, for half an hour, the situation remained unchanged.

The scouts would not leave their posts to give further warning of danger, for fear just at the point thus vacated the Sioux might press on toward the fort.

Then they knew that the chief of the Braves in Buckskin was a sleepless man when foes were about and duty was to be done.

He had read the intention of the Sioux, and would not be surprised.

So they waited until they saw the dark shadows that denoted the moving Sioux, coming to the attack.

It was all around the circle, and so they fell back rapidly, aroused the challenge of the wide-awake soldiers, and all pressed rapidly on into the fort, to find every man at his post and all ready for the attack.

The horses had been corraled for the night, and every man was ready to fight to the death.

On came the Indian circle, contracting its line as it came like a huge vampire to clutch its prey within its deadly folds.

Nearer and nearer, until within a hundred and fifty yards.

No sign came from the timber, and the red-skins felt sure of a surprise.

They did not think the soldiers believed they would return.

Then came one long, piercing yell, and it was echoed in a mighty, appalling chorus from over four hundred savage throats.

With this yell of the red fiends the ponies sprang forward for the rush.

But around the line came a circle of flame, and four-score rifles and carbines flashed forth death upon the foe.

There was a lull as the carbines were being reloaded, broken only by the repeating rifles of the Boys in Buckskin rattling continuously, and they had been so placed around the fort that they came from all quarters.

The scouts, seven in number, for the wounded were at their posts, with the officers, who also had repeating rifles, brought into action a dozen of these dangerous weapons.

Then came a cheer from the soldiers and another volley of carbines, followed by the rattle of revolvers, the yells of the red-skins, war-cries of the scouts, and the cheering of the troopers.

It was an appalling moment, and only a moment it lasted, for the red columns were shattered, broken, and went reeling back to cover, unable to stand the storm of fire they had rushed upon.

There were gallant deeds done by those same warriors—braves carried off, dead and dying, by their comrades, but no one to mark their acts of daring.

Back to the timber on the river-bank they rushed and staggered, and, in its coverts, beyond the range of the deadly repeating rifles, halted.

They were shattered, surprised, broken in spirit, yet revengeful.

Their Queen had gone with them, and, unseen in the darkness, two horses had been shot under her.

She was still in her riding-habit, but now, retiring to the shelter made for her, she once more appeared in her buckskin garb, beaded and feathered.

She dyed her face red with paint, showing her braves that she was on the trail to kill.

The chiefs had believed that reinforcements had really come; but she had pointed out to them that the shots of the pale-faces were few but deadly, and the repeating rifles of the Buckskin Braves had done fearful execution.

She reminded them that there were braves coming to their aid from their village and that the Sioux must win.

So the red line around the fort remained unbroken, cutting off all chance of sending for aid by the soldiers, and in the glare of day the Sioux lay down to rest, or sat gazing out upon the plain where lay a score of dead horses they had been unable to bring off, and half a hundred ponies fallen under the fearful fire.

"We beat them off that time, and with heavy loss, Cody."

"Now, Powell, what is our loss?" said Fred Forrester, as the red-skins were seen to re-enter their coverts and give up the fight for the day at least.

"Small, sir, for they held their fire hoping to get into our works."

"There are two soldiers and a scout dead, one of our negro servants also, and a dozen men more or less seriously wounded," replied Surgeon Powell, who had made a rapid run around the camp.

"Poor fellows," said Fred Forrester feelingly, and then he asked:

"What did you say, Cody?"

"If the Renegade Queen has more warriors coming, we need our help, sir, with all dispatch."

"Should those Sioux now here charge in solid column they would come in in spite of all we can do, so I will leave to-night at dark and hasten on our force."

"It would be madness, Bill."

"Oh, no, I am not much use here with my arm in a sling, and I can go through their lines."

"You could never get through, my dear Cody."

"Surgeon Powell has a wounded red bird

caged, and his feathers and rig will do for me, and you know I speak Sioux like a native."

"In the night I can pass for a brave if spoken to, and so get through."

"But a horse can never go through."

"Oh, no, sir, but there are some four hundred Indian ponies to pick from, and maybe I can hit upon one of Queen Renegade's fine animals, and if so I am in great luck."

"I suppose you will go, Bill, and you know best," said the captain in a tone that showed his regret, while Surgeon Powell added:

"Somehow, Fred, I don't think Cody is born to be scalped, and he has taken chances as desperate before, yes worse chances, and if he can get through, it will surely hasten our fellows on, and every hour counts, for men, ammunition and food are dwindling fast."

"That's why I go," responded Buffalo Bill, and then he added:

"Now I'll get breakfast and go to sleep, and you, Frank, please rig up Red Eagle's outfit for me the best you can."

With this the scout ate his breakfast, had his wound carefully dressed and lay down to sleep.

It was late in the afternoon when he awoke, perfectly rested, and his wound was again carefully dressed.

Then he tried on his Indian rig and it was pronounced perfect.

After a good dinner, he was painted up by Surgeon Powell, donned Red Eagle's costume, and just after nightfall sallied forth upon his desperate mission.

And all day long not a red-skin had been seen by any one at the fort, except the dead braves that coyotes were snarling and fighting over, although there were enough for a feast.

CHAPTER XLII.

WELL MET.

"TEXAS JACK!"

The words came from the lips of Buffalo Bill, just a second before the Texan had uttered his name, and the two friends rode rapidly toward each other.

"Well, Bill, how is it I find you here, when I thought you were in Fort Forlorn, as we might call Captain Forrester's camp?"

"I left there last night, dressed up in Chief Red Eagle's outfit, and I guess I haven't got the paint off my face yet, and here's the rig," and Buffalo Bill pointed to the Indian garb rolled up and tied to the red-skin saddle he rode.

"You mean you came out through the lines dressed as a red?"

"Yes, and I played Injun Jack to the queen's taste, you bet."

"I got to the lines all right, and ran right upon a Sioux, who called to me."

"I replied gruffly and passed on, and although I saw a number lying around no one spoke."

"Soon I ran right upon the Renegade Queen's quarters, for there was her wicky-up they had made for her and her horses."

"But she was not there, and that was my chance."

"I could not help taking a slip of paper from my pocket, and with my pencil I wrote her a note."

"What did you say, Bill?" asked Jack, deeply interested.

"Simply this:

"The Renegade Queen is anxious to be avenged upon Buffalo Bill, as she has sworn to be, and yet I come to her camp, take one of her horses and go to the fort after aid to beat her and her braves back to the mountains."

"You told her your errand?"

"Certainly, for she will know I cannot make the ride and return under four days, and I knew I would surely head off reinforcements before to-morrow, and thus give her a surprise."

"You are a cunning one, Bill; but that is her horse?"

"Yes, and an Indian saddle, for I borrowed it from a warrior whose horse was staked near."

"I tell you, Jack, I came through those red-skins' lines in great shape."

"You generally do; but now let me tell you what I have done, and don't you forget it, but I am glad we have met, for we can just play a game that will beat Mister Lo at all points."

Texas Jack then told his story of how he had followed the Sioux courier and discovered that he had gone to Signal Mountain and signaled for five hundred warriors.

"Now, Bill, it will be late to-morrow night before they can reach the Renegade Queen, and if we meet with the troops to-day, or to-night, we can run a force of cavalry to the pass, through which they must come, and ambush them there."

"Then the rest can go on to the relief of Captain Forrester, and when the Renegade Queen has to get up and git, why, we can ambush them on their retreat, do you see, and thus strike a double blow."

"This is my plan, Bill."

"And a good one, and you can go with the force to head off the Queen's reinforcements, while I will guide the rest of the troops to Captain Forrester's relief, and he needs help, too, for it was a close call night before last,

Jack, and I only hope that last night they were as successful as we were the night before."

"That's a splendid fellow, Captain Forrester is, Jack."

"You bet he is, and a man to tie to every time, and if he gets out of this scrape all right, it will be a dozen feathers in his cap."

The horses of the two Braves in Buckskin had now had a short rest, and so they rode on together, the animal which Buffalo Bill had taken from the Renegade Queen proving to be a fine one; but he did not like his Indian saddle and often wished for his own.

When they again halted Jack dressed the chief's wound, which was giving him some pain, and then they had a good meal, the Texan being the cook.

A nap of an hour sufficed for rest for them, and on they went, following the trail by which they knew the reinforcements must come.

Late in the afternoon they both uttered a cry together, for their eyes had fallen upon a party of horsemen.

"There they come, Jack!"

"Hurrah, Bill! hurrah!"

And the scouts halted to give their horses rest.

In half an hour Captain Roe came up at a canter, and the scouts were greeted with a cheer by the cavalry.

In a few words Buffalo Bill told all that had happened Assistant Surgeon Dillon, the while dressing his wounded arm, and then Jack made known what he had to say and his plan.

"If Forrester was not taken last night he can hold out until to-morrow night you think, Cody?"

"Yes, Captain Roe."

"The Sioux have about four hundred and fifty against him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lieutenant Bennett?"

"Yes, sir."

"Send two of your best-mounted couriers back to hasten on Captain Ames."

"Send two in case one breaks down, and have him say to Captain Ames that another force of red-skins takes off from the relief of Forrester one hundred and fifty men; but that I push on fifty men to his aid, hoping they may arrive in time."

"I shall take one gun with me with Lieutenant Germaine, letting the other piece go with the fifty men."

"Say to Captain Ames to spare not his men, but to push to the aid of Captain Forrester with all haste, and to say to Captain Forrester that when the Renegade Queen and her force are set going for the village that he will find my force between them and their retreat; so rush them hard upon my ambush."

Lieutenant Bennett had written on a tablet as fast as Captain Roe had talked, and putting the dispatch in an envelope, called up the couriers and sent them back with all haste.

"Do not spare your cattle, and if they fail you get down to it on foot, men, for lives hang on your speed," called out Captain Roe, and away sped the two men.

Then the men went into camp for a rest, and the division was made, of fifty cavalry and one gun to go on to Captain Forrester's aid, and the remainder of a hundred and fifty troopers to push on with the other piece under the guidance of Texas Jack, to head off the force of braves coming from the Sioux village.

"It will be a show of aid only that will be wanted to set those fellows besieging Forrester in motion," remarked Captain Roe, and Buffalo Bill replied:

"Yes, sir, and the one gun will do much; but if we find Captain Forrester still holding out, let me suggest that you wait without showing yourself, for the infantry, and then we can attack with a force to do some damage."

"I can scout on ahead and return and report how matters are."

"You are right, Cody, and I'll do it; but now let us be on the move."

The two bands of troopers then separated, the large force under Captain Roe guided by Texas Jack to ambush the force of red-skins coming to the aid of the Renegade Queen, and the small force under Lieutenant Bennett going on with Buffalo Bill as guide to the relief of brave Fred Forrester and his men.

CHAPTER XLIII.

DEVIL DICK AND THE LADY SPORT.

I WILL now return to other characters and scenes in my story, which must not be forgotten, for the Lady Sport and those about her in Gold Pocket City play prominent parts in this romance which has so much of truth for a basis.

When Devil Dick's arrival at The Roost was known there was a damper fell upon many hearts.

They seemed to know that there would be trouble, and of a very serious nature.

Of course he meant to gamble, and to win, and he would naturally play with the Lady Sport.

He was believed to be a card-sharp, and yet he must not cheat the Lady Sport was the verdict of all.

Then many recalled her scene with Bravo Ben

and concluded that she was fully able to take care of herself, so they had best not interfere.

The desperado, on account of having to meet a lady, it was supposed, had spruced up.

He had bought at the store a new flannel shirt, a black scarf, dove-colored sombrero, and the camp barber had trimmed up his hair and given him a clean shave.

"He'll be all ready fer buryin' ef some one lays him out," said one.

But the man still looked like a terror.

His face, scarred terribly, was by no means handsome, and his eyes as he entered Poker Hall roamed around the room as though searching for prey.

His belt was not new, for there must be no hitch in his drawing a revolver or his knife.

Devil Dick took no chances.

He meant to be always sure.

Games were going on, but the Lady Sport had not arrived, so Devil Dick went over and took a seat in the shadow, where he could see her well.

No one asked him to play, and yet if he had decided to join in a game not a soul would have objected.

Soon after he entered Hazard Harry came in, and many eyes were upon the two.

Hazard Harry had said in the hotel that the Lady Sport should not be cheated or bullied even by Devil Dick, and those who knew Hazard Harry was well aware that he was not a man to make an idle threat.

He had also rigged up in his best, and spying Devil Dick went over in his vicinity and took a seat.

"Join us, Harry?" asked a man at a table near.

"No, I won't play just now," was the reply.

"Waiting for the Lady Sport, eh?" said Devil Dick quickly.

"Yes."

"So am I," and no more was said.

Soon there came a movement of the curtains over the window, it was drawn aside and the Lady Sport appeared.

She looked her very best, and that means that she was beautiful.

She was dressed in her Mexican costume, but seemed to have taken greater pains to appear well on that evening.

She carried her little sachel, with her money and cards, in her hand, and, with a bow meant for all, sprung from the window to the floor and took her seat.

A cheer greeted her, and she bowed sweetly, and then seemed prepared for business.

At first sight of her, Devil Dick winced as though he had been hurt.

He half arose to his feet, his scarred face flushing crimson, and then turning to the hue of death.

His teeth were set close together, his eyes glared upon the face of the woman, and he looked like a wild beast at bay.

"My God! my God!" came through his shut teeth, and he trembled violently as he gasped:

"No, no, it cannot be!"

In the coming of the Lady Sport no one had longer noticed Devil Dick, so his emotion was not seen by any one except Landlord Boniface, who was in front of him.

Then came in her musical voice, and broken foreign accent, the query of the Lady Sport:

"I am ready for business, gentlemen."

"Who dare ply with the Queen of Luck?"

She glanced over the room, and her eyes seemed to meet each pair that they were turned upon.

There was a smile upon her face, a winning look that was inscrutable, and many intended to accept her challenge, if only to lose their money to one so beautiful, when in a voice of thunder came the response from Devil Dick:

"I dare, by Heaven!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

PLAYED TO WIN.

ALL started at the words of Devil Dick, accustomed as were the miners of Gold Pocket City to loud voices, oaths and outcries.

But the Lady Sport did not move.

Her eyes turned upon the man as he came toward her, and his gaze met hers.

The miners all saw then that she paled, and more thought that she started, as though to fly from him.

But, whatever her intention, it was quickly checked, and she bent over and picked up her handkerchief, which she had dropped.

If the act was intentional, it was successful, for it brought the color back into her face by her stooping.

Then she was face to face with Devil Dick when she looked up, and Hazard Harry stood to one side, as though to carry out his threat, though his manner was strangely calm.

"You will play with me then, sir," she said, with a foreign accent more marked than was her wont, and her eyes did not at first meet those of the desperado.

"You defied any man to play with you, did you not?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Yes."

"Then I take up your gauntlet, and will play."

"For what amount, sir?"

And Hazard Harry thought that the Lady Sport was a trifle nervous.

"Any sum, for I do not care."

She fingered the cards quietly, and said:

"Shall we not make it a four-handed game?"

"No."

"But my stakes may be larger, and I have a right to win if I can."

"Yes; and I say name the sum."

"I wish to play with you, you alone, and I do not care what game it is, or for what the stakes."

"You are a reckless player, then?"

"No, a safe player, but a game one."

"I warn you, Lady Sport, that Devil Dick is the worst hand with cards in the mines, and plays to win."

The warning came from Hazard Harry, and he had his hand conveniently near his revolver-butt as he spoke; but to the surprise of all, Devil Dick did not even turn toward him as he said in Spanish:

"Your friend says right, señorita; I do play to win, in whatever I undertake."

Instantly came the reply, in low, musical Spanish:

"So do I, señor, and I never lose."

"That we shall see," responded the desperado, and he drew from his pocket a large roll of banknotes and placed them upon the table.

Hazard Harry and Landlord Boniface had both noticed the few words of Spanish spoken between them, and the landlord thought that he detected a look of disappointment in the face of the man at the woman's prompt reply, while Hazard Harry distinctly heard the muttered words:

"I am wrong; it is not she."

"In that roll I have several thousand dollars, fair gambler, so let us make it a game for five hundred to begin with."

"That will suit me, señor," was the reply, and she placed the cards upon the table and soon after began the game.

All other games in the hall had come to an end, for there was too much interest felt by one and all in seeing the Lady Sport and Devil Dick engaged in gambling for others to keep on with their playing.

Then, too, there seemed a chance that Hazard Harry intended to chip in in some way as the champion of the Lady Sport, and by common consent an open space was left around him, should the desperado choose to send a bullet in that direction.

The woman was calm, but smiling, the man stern and cynical.

There, behind the Lady Sport sat Jersey, who, a privileged character with her, had slipped in at the window, having come from looking after her horses.

The game ended with Devil Dick the loser.

He did not wince, and every eye was upon him.

"You are lucky, Lady Sport."

"Try it again with a thousand at stake," and he threw down the required number of bills.

"Very well, sir," was the quiet reply, and another game was played and lost by Devil Dick.

Still he did not wince, and the crowd wondered.

He was not like the Devil Dick they had known.

"There are fifteen hundred for this game," he coolly said, laying the remainder of the bills upon the table.

The Lady Sport covered the amount with her money, and a third game was lost by the desperado.

There was a murmur of applause, and yet the gambler did not turn upon the crowd.

"I am not broke yet, fair sport, so stake two thousand on the next game," and he thrust his hand into an inner pocket and it returned with another roll of bills.

"Be careful, Lady Sport, for Devil Dick is too quiet to mean good."

Again the warning came from Hazard Harry, and again his hand was ready to draw to back up his words.

Hazard Harry was already a hero in the eyes of all, to thus beard the desperate Devil Dick.

But, as before, the desperado did not notice him, more than to glance toward him to see who it was that spoke.

"Thank you, sir, but I do not fear a card-sharp, nor dread even Devil Dick, whom all seem to fear so," was the smiling reply.

"No, I am not dangerous."

"A lamb could lead me, if she goes about it right," replied Devil Dick, with a rough laugh.

The woman winced at this, but covered the two thousand dollars on the table for the next game.

Then the two played slowly and cautiously, and once more luck was on the side of the woman.

Still Devil Dick showed no sign of annoyance, and only said:

"I am gone broke to-night, lady; but we will meet again, for, like yourself, I am a born card-sharp, only you are the sharpest of the two."

"By Heaven, do you accuse the lady of cheating?"

Hazard Harry again it was, and he was seemingly anxious to pick a quarrel with the desperado.

"Yes, Lady Sport, we will meet again," and Devil Dick seemed not to have heard Hazard Harry's words, as he continued:

"Now good-night, and luck attend you—"

"Now, sir, our game begins."

With the last words he had turned quick as a flash and faced Hazard Harry, who was caught off his guard.

There were two sharp reports, one a second before the other, and Devil Dick backed out of the room, a revolver in each hand, as though at bay, and Hazard Harry lay dead on the floor, a bullet in his brain.

"Gentlemen, I played the last game to win—good-night."

With this, Devil Dick backed out of the door and was gone.

CHAPTER XLV.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

THE excitement following the departure of Devil Dick was intense in Poker Hall.

A dozen revolvers had been drawn, yet no man had courted a shot from the desperado by risking a shot at him.

Then there was a spirit of fair play too, for Hazard Harry had seemed to urge on a fracas and had already drawn his revolver for use, only was not as quick as his foe, who even then caught him off his guard.

The bullet of Hazard Harry had gone no one in the hall knew where; but Devil Dick knew, for it had lodged in the fleshy part of his arm.

Hazard Harry had been borne off by friends, and for some reason the Lady Sport had not cared to play longer, though the excitement soon blew over.

It could not be that she was unnerved by the death of Hazard Harry, after having herself thrown her bowie into the hand and arm of Bravo Ben a short while before.

But she refused to play, retired to her cabin and dismissed Jersey, who followed her, as she said she wished to be alone.

In the mean time Devil Dick had gone to the drug-store and bade "Doctor Pills" extract the bullet.

He did not quiver at the probe, or the withdrawing of the bullet, and after it was dressed brought some bandages and arnica from Pills, paid him handsomely for his services, buckled on his haversack and blanket and left.

He made his way to Bravo Ben's cabin, and found that worthy turning on his cot with pain.

"Waal, did yer see her?"

"Yes."

"Yer went to ther hall?"

"I did."

"And seen her?"

"Yes."

"Yer is back soon."

"There was no need to remain longer."

"Good Lord! did yer chip in so soon?"

"Yes, she won just five thousand dollars from me."

"Ther deuce! did yer have it ter lose?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you kilt her?"

"Not I."

"Why not?"

"Because I am not the man to kill that woman and I pity any other man that does do so and I find him out."

"Lordy! you weakened on her beauty?"

"No; but I will not do your dirty work for you, so name the sum you value your services at in saving my life and I'll pay you."

"Does yer mean it?"

"Yes."

"Waal, it's worth a thousand, for I'll have ter pay another man to do ther job."

"What job?" and Devil Dick counted out one thousand dollars and placed it on the table by Bravo Ben.

"Ter kill ther woman."

Instantly Devil Dick was upon his feet, his eyes blazing, and dropping his hands upon either shoulder of the wounded man he said in a voice quivering with passion:

"I say no! and, Bravo Ben, if that woman dies in ther mines I'll burn you at the stake, so help me God!"

"Hear me, man, and heed!"

"I have squared, at your own price, the debt I owed you and now I am free from gratitude even."

"But let me tell you that no one shall harm that woman, and if aught happens to her, no matter by whose hand, I'll track you like a bloodhound for revenge."

He said no more but turned on his heel and left Bravo Ben trembling with terror.

The next morning the Lady Sport looked pale, and Jersey suggested a ride.

"I'll go, Jersey, but alone, for somehow I am not pleasant company just now," was the answer, and mounting Yellow Chief, as she had named her claybank, she rode rapidly up the mountain trail.

She had reached a lonely point, where there

was a good lookout which Jersey had shown her and was just turning into when a man's voice called out:

"Hold on, Ruby, I wish to speak to you."

The woman reeled in her saddle, clutched at the air and fell into the arms of Devil Dick.

"She has fainted: well, it was a little sudden, I admit," he said, as he hitched her horse and placed her upon a mossy bank near.

Then he took water from a canteen swung to his knapsack and bathed her face, and chafed her hands until her eyes opened and met his.

She started to her feet and cried:

"You are Oscar Ballard?"

"Yes, Ruby," and his voice was low and musical, almost pathetic.

"I feared it last night."

"Feared it?" and there was anger in his tone.

"Yes, for I cared not to meet you again, Oscar."

"Once you told me you loved me, and you were my little girl sweetheart."

"But all went wrong with me, Ruby, and I became a wanderer."

"I went north, south, east and west, to other lands, was a sailor, a soldier and now am a tramp, like unto a vagabond."

"But I could not drive your image from my memory, and so I worked for you to get wealth to one day lay at your feet with my heart, and ask you to be my wife."

His voice was full of pathos, and there was a look in his eyes unlike what was usually seen there.

She shuddered and he said, quickly:

"You abhor me, for I am so scarred, so hideous, and yet once you called me your handsome lover; but I have passed through enough, Ruby, in my hunt for gold to kill a dozen men."

"But gold I sought, and gold I have, for I am rich, and my love, my riches, I offer to you."

He showed his weakness just there, for if he was rich, then why should she care how hideous he was, and so she said:

"I did not shudder at your appearance, Oscar, for it is your heart, not the face I recall; but I shuddered at the story I have to tell you."

"Then you, too, have suffered, Ruby?"

"Ah! so much."

"You must have, for me to find you here, a gambler, and known as Bowie-knife Bessie."

"That is a part I am playing, and for revenge, Oscar."

"Let me tell you that my mother forced me to marry one, a cadet at West Point, who inveigled me into his clutches by a mock marriage."

"He was rich, and never owned me before the world as his wife, and when my mother died I had to seek him to support me."

"I sought him at the fort where he is stationed, but he drove me from him, and it was through him that my poor brother Benson was forced to desert and then be shot for outlawry."

"He gave me some money and I devoted it to revenge."

"I was an adept at cards, could always ride and drive well, and you taught me in the long ago how to throw a knife with deadly aim."

"So I came here to gamble, to get money and seek my revenge upon my husband."

"Now, Oscar Ballard, if you love me, put that man, my husband, Fred Forrester, out of the way, and the day after I will become your wife."

"I will do it, by Heaven!"

"Until then we are strangers."

"He is at Fort Fairview, and you know where to find me, when he is dead," and the beautiful and false-tongued plotter sprang into her saddle and rode rapidly away, well knowing that she had set a bloodhound upon the trail of Fred Forrester.

And as she rode along she muttered between her teeth:

"His wife, yes; then a few drops of poison will make me a widow, and a rich one."

CHAPTER XLVI.

ONLY A RUSE.

As on the night before, the Sioux surrounding the little fort in the timber, made another charge upon the brave defenders just before dawn.

But Captain Forrester had all the day before, and until late in the night, been strengthening his position.

He had allowed those who were to watch at night to sleep all day and not work, so that they would be wide awake for their duty to perform.

There had been more trees felled, and the ragged branches had been placed around the fortification to serve as a kind of *chevaux-de-frise*, which he knew the ponies of the Indians would not run upon.

Then earth had been thrown into the openings to protect the defenders from bullets and arrows, and more, as soon as it was dark three dozen men had gone out with spades and shovels to dig holes, like post-holes, to throw the ponies in their charge.

And these were dug within easy range of the works.

Water-buckets were filled at sunset and placed around the fortifications, the guards went on duty, going out as far as the newly-dug holes,

while the Braves in Buckskin scouted on some distance further.

All had watched the departure of Buffalo Bill with deepest anxiety, and Surgeon Frank Powell had asserted, after he had been gone a couple of hours, that he surely had not been captured, for if so, some red-skin would have given vent to a war-whoop of delight.

In fact, not a red-skin had been seen during the entire day, and yet the defenders of the fort were not deceived, for they knew they were there, but pretended to have left to draw them out.

So the night passed away until an hour before dawn, when Fred Forrester, who was half asleep as he sat near the works, was awakened by a touch on his arm.

"It is you, Frank?"

"Yes, I have been out on a scout, and they are coming, but slowly."

"I ordered the scouts and sentinels in, so be ready."

"All is in readiness," and the captain waited until the signal agreed upon, a war-cry of one of the scouts.

The red-skins sprung to their feet and leaped upon their horses at the cry, for it told them that they were discovered.

Then the charge was made, and like an avalanche the Sioux rushed on, and just as the leading ponies went down in a mass, by falling into the holes, the fire from the troops opened, and once more the red-skins were beaten off.

The idea of Fred Forrester in digging those holes had proven a success, for it threw those behind in a panic to see their comrades go down so suddenly before them.

When the dawn broke, it showed the Sioux others of their dead upon the field, and their loss in ponies, from broken limbs, had been very great.

But it revealed the cause of their sudden defeat, and the chiefs congregated together for another pow-wow with the Renegade Queen, the result of which was that by noon the whole force was seen to file away over a distant rise of prairie and disappear.

A cheer broke from the troopers, but Surgeon Powell said quietly:

"Do not cheer yet, boys, for those red-skins are only playing smart."

"They will not go and leave their dead upon the field, and, besides, they have sent for reinforcements and will return with a much heavier force."

"Yes, and I would not be surprised if they even left us alone to-night, to carry out their cunning ruse the better," remarked Captain Forrester, and he added:

"I hate to see those poor animals suffer, and wish we could spare the ammunition to shoot them."

"I'll take Indian ammunition and do it," responded the surgeon, and he sprung upon his horse and rode out upon the field, and swooping from his saddle, picked up a bow and some quivers of arrows, with which he hastily put an end to the misery of the suffering brutes, for the Surgeon Scout was a dead shot with bow and arrows.

Then he hailed for a squad of soldiers to be sent out and the dead Indians were buried, and the party returned to the fort.

"Their scouts are watching us," he remarked to Fred Forrester as he returned.

Thus the day passed and another night came on. The horses had gotten a good feed on the grass near the timber, so were all right; but the provisions had run low, and there was no game to help out.

The force had lost a dozen killed, and fully a score were wounded, and could only do service in an emergency.

Red Eagle had recuperated rapidly, under the kind care of the Surgeon Scout, who made up his mind that when the danger of attack was over the chief should find a chance to escape, for he had not forgotten the service rendered him by the red-skin leader.

That night, as Captain Forrester had predicted, passed without an attack; but the little garrison was not to be caught napping, for they knew that the Sioux had not gone far, and that their scouts were watching them, only waiting for them to leave their stronghold to pounce upon them.

When morning came and no troops appeared, all began to be most anxious.

Had the stranger reached Fort Fairview?

Had not some accident befallen him?

Had the chief of scouts also escaped?

Such queries were going the rounds with some anxiety.

Provisions were about used up, ammunition was at low ebb and the future looked gloomy indeed.

"To-night the closest watch must be kept," came the order from Captain Forrester, and it was obeyed.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A QUEEN AT BAY.

WELL was it for the garrison in the timber that Captain Forrester's order for a close watch to be kept was obeyed, for at dawn there came

a roaring, rushing sound, and in one massive, solid column, a hundred yards in width, came the Sioux upon the little garrison.

The rifles and carbines belched forth, and red-skins and ponies went down; but on they came with appalling yells, shots from their firearms and showers of arrows, and it seemed as though the end had come for the brave defenders.

Up to the rocks they came, and there stood the devoted leader with his little band, ready to die like the true men they were.

But a loud report shook the ground, another and another, and bursting shells fell into the Indian mass, while following them came a ringing cheer from men of the gallant—th Cavalry, and half a hundred brave horsemen swept like the wind over the prairie right upon the frightened, startled Sioux.

Back behind them came answering cheers from two hundred throats, and again the three pieces of light artillery flashed forth, and with yells of terror from what they called the "wagon guns," the savage force under the Renegade Queen broke in wild disorder, in the recovering moment to them of their success, and fled from the scene.

"You are able to go now, Red Eagle, so throw on this cloak, put on this hat and come with me."

So said Frank Powell to the Red Eagle, who, five minutes after, mounted upon a fleet horse, though he was still weak from his wounds, was flying across the prairie after his shattered squadron of red-skin cavalry.

And out of the fort, mounted and ready for the fray, with half a hundred gallant troopers at his back, had ridden Fred Forrester.

He was met by Lieutenant Bennett, who said, hastily:

"I have orders to report to you, Captain Forrester, from Captain Roe, who has gone on a flank move toward Signal Mountain under the guidance of Texas Jack to ambush a large force of Sioux on the way to reinforce the Renegade Queen."

"I have fifty men, sir, of the —th, and Lieutenant Germaine is here with three guns, the fourth having gone with Captain Roe."

"And I, too, have to report to you, Captain Forrester, with two hundred of the —th Infantry."

"Permit me to congratulate you upon your gallant defense of your fort."

"Thank you, sir, and permit me, gentlemen, to thank you for your timely rescue, for had you not come not a man of my little garrison would now be alive."

"But who was sent to take command, may I ask?"

Such a frank acknowledgment of the service they had rendered completely took the three officers, Ames, Bennett and Germaine, aback, and the former said:

"You are the ranking officer, Captain Forrester, and we await your orders."

"You shall have them, gentlemen—it is dawn now, so I'll push on after the Sioux, leaving one gun, a company of infantry and half a dozen cavalrymen here, for there are wounded to look to."

Five minutes after, the cavalry, under Fred Forrester were in rapid pursuit, with two pieces of artillery, and the infantry were coming on at a forced march as a reserve.

From the tops of the prairie rise the two guns would open fire, pitching shells after the flying Sioux, who had become terror-stricken, and fled at the utmost speed of their ponies.

Buffalo Bill and half a dozen of his men had already gone on, and suddenly dashing into a fringe of timber ahead of his men the chief of scouts drew rein with a suddenness that threw his horse on his haunches.

"My God! she has killed herself," he cried, as he sprung from his horse and ran toward the Renegade Queen, whose horse had been wounded and fallen with her, and believing herself about to be captured she had turned her revolver toward her bosom and pulled trigger.

"Yes, I have killed myself, Buffalo Bill, and it is a fitting ending for a Renegade Queen, is it not?"

"Perhaps the wound may not be fatal, and—Ho, Nelse, ride back for Surgeon Powell."

"It is useless, for I have my death-wound, and you would have me live to hang me?"

"Indeed, no; you wrong me, for wicked though you were, you are a woman, and I could do you no harm."

"I held pity for your husband, and I do for you, and God knows I would not see you die thus, and were it in my power to save you, gladly would I do so."

"Buffalo Bill, there are tears in your eyes, a quiver in your voice, that are not feigned."

"You did your duty in hunting my husband to his doom, in tracking me to death."

"I loved him, and that made me what I am, a renegade from my people."

"I thank God I am believed by those who knew me in the past to be dead, so no one will know me as I am."

"I am dying, and I leave to you this ring; he gave it to me, and you keep it for my sake—and more, do me one great favor."

"I will gladly do so," and the voice of the scout was choked with emotion.

"Bear my body to Eagle Canyon and bury it by the side of him for whom I gave up all, and now my life as a renegade, a foe to my own race."

"I will, so help me Heaven," came in the deep, earnest voice of the chief of scouts.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MAJOR DENTON TAKES THE FIELD.

"WELL, wife, Forrester is certainly getting all the chances of promotion, and his pluck and nerve deserve it," said Major Denton, the morning after the departure of Captain Roe with the relief for the besieged men under Captain Fred Forrester's command.

"Somehow I hope he will extricate himself before the relief reaches him, for some of his foes among the officers are none too good to make him feel it," Mrs. Denton responded.

"I only hope he'll be able to escape with his command; but from what that strange gentleman, Mr. Roy Rockland, said, he certainly is in a desperately dangerous situation," said Kate Kennerley.

"Well, yes, he is, I admit; but then I have perfect faith in Forrester to do what is best, and his daring and genius will help him out."

"But what did you think of Mr. Roy Rockland?"

And the major smiled.

"A gentleman by birth and education, a gambler by profession, is my criticism of him," Mrs. Denton remarked, naively.

"Yes; a gentleman, certainly, courtly as a Chesterfield, well-informed, and a man who has seen much of the world, and one whom I regret to see acknowledge himself to be a professional gambler."

"What do you think, Kate?"

"I hardly know what to think, guardian."

"He acted so modestly throughout, and when invited to be seated at your table, frankly confessed his calling, so as not to place you in a false position."

"I think he is one who has seen much of misfortune and sorrow, and became a gambler, as he says, from sheer force of circumstances."

"I am, however, sorry he did not remain longer at the fort, though in his going I think it was his intention to relieve the colonel from a guest he could not be proud of."

"Well said, Kate; but yet he is a man to be proud of from all Forrester wrote of him, and you know the captain is not given to gush."

"But I hope we may see more of this mysterious and handsome stranger, Rockland, and if he has gone to Gold Pocket City, there is no doubt but that we will at least hear of him."

"But I must go over and talk with the general, for several couriers have arrived this morning, and I do not exactly like the situation of affairs, for that Renegade Queen may be on the war-path with fifteen hundred Sioux warriors at her back, to avenge her renegade husband's death."

"Then you really think there is danger along the line?" asked Mrs. Denton.

"Certainly there is, my dear, and neither of you ladies must put your pretty noses beyond the stockade wall until I give you permission, for with Kate's adventures, the Boy Bugler, Miss Meserole's visit, the killing of Captain Brimstone, execution of Snow Face, the renegade, and this visit of Mr. Roy Rockland with his important news, not to speak of Forrester's misfortunes, sorrows and duel, with that foolish fellow, Lieutenant Rockford, who did not deserve mercy at his hands, we have had excitement enough."

"My! what a category of exciting incidents!"

"Don't add to them, please, I beg of you," and with a laugh the gallant old major buckled on his sword, and donning his hat went to report to his commandant.

Colonel Cassidy had received dispatches from the other posts and settlements, as also from the mines, stating that couriers had arrived from Captain Forrester, up in the Sioux country, warning them of danger, and asking protection from Fort Fairview, for rumors were coming in that numerous large bands of Indians were on the war-path, and committing depredations and untold acts of cruelty.

"This is all nonsense, for not an Indian has been seen except by Forrester and Buffalo Bill's party, I am sure."

"With those two men between us and the Sioux country, I fear no advance without being notified."

"But I will send off a dozen couriers to report at each point that Captain Forrester, with a large force, is on the trail of the Indians and watching them, but that it will be well for the border lines of posts and settlements to have their men in readiness to move if needed," and Colonel Cassidy spoke to Major Denton, who responded:

"Yes, sir, for the outposts are in no danger of a surprise, not with men like Forrester and Cody between them and the enemy, and the men you sent last night to Captain Forrester will soon straighten out the Sioux and whip them into subjection."

But still there could not but be a certain anxiety felt by all at the situation, for it was known that the Sioux could put fifteen hundred warriors in the saddle, all mounted and armed, and yet keep a large reserve in their village, or to hang in the rear of an advance in large force under their chiefs.

That the Renegade Queen meant to avenge her husband's death all felt sure, and a woman's capacity for mischief and devilry when aroused to it, many were aware of, so a general feeling of disquiet rested upon those at Fort Fairview from Colonel Cassidy down to the smallest drummer-boy.

Then too the colonel did not have as large a force as he could wish, for left in the fort there were not of all arms over eight hundred men.

Those who had marched away too were the flower of the troops, and with such officers as Captains Tabor, Roe and Ames, Surgeons Powell and Dillon, and Lieutenants Germaine, Bennett, and others in deadly peril, not to speak of the men, the family circles at the fort, from highest to lowest could not but feel anxious.

As for Captain Fred Forrester, those who longed to have no harm befall him could be easily numbered among the officers and their wives.

And yet he had a few friends, true as steel, and they hoped that he would return with honor, that would bring another blush of shame to the cheeks of his traducers.

There was one whose heart was sorely troubled on his account, and that one was Kate Kennerley.

Their friendship had been a strange one indeed, for to her it had seemed more than friendship, and yet not a word of love had he ever uttered to her.

What it was that kept them apart she could not tell, for she knew, with the intuitive knowledge of a woman, which seldom fails in its analysis of a man's feelings toward her, that he regarded her more nearly than a friend, and yet not as a sister.

"Oh, if the mystery of that strange, beautiful woman, who masqueraded as a Boy Bugler, and again as Miss Meserole, could be cleared up, I believe I could be happy."

"What is she to him?"

"What can he be to her?"

"Her master, certainly, for he drove her from the fort, and she fled from him at the time of my rescue."

"Oh! who is she?"

"What is she to him?"

But the wailing question of Kate Kennerley remained unanswered.

Days passed away, and yet no report came from the fort.

No courier arrived with news of a victory.

No word came that Fred Forrester and his gallant band had been rescued and the Sioux beaten back to their mountain stronghold.

Captains Roe and Ames had orders to send a courier back on their arrival; but they had not done so.

Had the whole command—Forrester and his men and his relief, with Buffalo Bill's Braves in Buckskin, all been wiped out?

Could it be that five hundred gallant Boys in Blue had met with defeat, annihilation?

The question was unanswered, and so Colonel Cassidy called his officers together, and Major Denton asked to take the field with a flying force.

His request was granted, and, with two companies of cavalry, four of infantry mounted for the march, and two field guns, he set off to the aid of those who had gone before, or to strike a bitter blow to avenge them, if, as many feared, a terrible fate had overwhelmed them.

And upon Fort Fairview fell a gloom that those left behind could not shake off; and such is human nature, that many censured Fred Forrester for it all, as he had been the one to go upon a scout and bring the others into peril to go to his relief.

CHAPTER XLIX.

PUSHED TO THE WALL.

It looked sad indeed to Fred Forrester as he dashed up, with Surgeon Powell by his side—for in a fight the Surgeon Scout left his assistants to care for the wounded while he went to the front—to see the Renegade Queen lying upon the ground dying.

The scout had moved her to a mossy bank and smoothed her barbaric costume about her, while he had placed his blanket beneath her head.

Her voice had grown huskier as she had talked to him, until at last it sunk to a whisper.

But her eyes beckoned to him to bend down, and she said in a tone hardly audible:

"Hold my hand, Cody."

He grasped the tiny hand in his and thus knelt by her side when Fred Forrester dashed up.

A look of pain flashed over the face of the officer, which changed to anger as he sternly said:

"What man dared do this act?"

"Speak, Cody, for I shall have him shot for it."

Ere the scout could reply, to his surprise the glorious eyes opened and with an effort came the answer in a firm voice:

"I took my own life, and it is better so—I deserve my fate."

The eyes closed again and with a little gasp her life ended.

Calling to one of his men Captain Forrester ordered him to guard the body, and sent after an ambulance in which to remove it to Eagle Canyon, when Buffalo Bill made known the woman's dying request.

"Yes, let her be buried there, as she wished, and she said truly that it was best that she died in the manner she did, for what could we have done with her?"

"Did she say aught about herself, Cody?"

"Nothing more than that her love for her husband had made her what she was, and that her friends already believed her dead."

"May I ask for a small escort to go with one of my scouts to Eagle Canyon with the body, and I will meet them there to-night, for I wish to press on with you now."

"You are wounded, Bill, and had better drop out of the pursuit."

"Oh no, for my arm is not very painful, and I wish to know if Texas Jack's plan panned out as he hoped."

"Very well," and Captain Forrester gave the order, and they pushed on rapidly after the cavalry in pursuit of the Sioux.

The retreat of the red-skins had now become a chase, for with their Queen missing, Red Eagle dead or a prisoner, Panther Eye dead, and their forces cut up terribly, the Indians were straining every nerve to reach the force sent to join them, and which they hoped would check their foes and turn the tide in their favor.

Gradually they became less scattered, and verging toward a given point were soon in column, flying column though it was.

Then they saw how they had suffered, and their faces darkened with hatred and fury.

Behind them came the cavalry, the rested horses of Fred Forrester and his men in advance, and behind his relief mounted force, with two pieces of artillery, which the Indians the more greatly feared.

At any rise in the prairie suitable, the guns would be unlimbered, aimed and fired, and a shell would burst over the heads of the flying red-skins, killing, wounding and spreading terror among them.

So the chase went on for several hours, and then a halt was called by Fred Forrester to rest his horses and let the stragglers come up.

But the Indians pressed on, urging their tired ponies forward with quirt and spur.

They had tried to bear away their wounded and dead, but this double weight on their ponies retarded them, and, as it were, some of the braves were dismounted and flying along by holding to the tails of their comrades' ponies, with here and there one mounted up behind another.

Buffalo Bill had ridden to a ridge and was looking ahead with his glass to his eyes.

Suddenly he hailed Captain Forrester to come to him, and hardly had he done so when the deep boom of artillery fell on their ears.

One shot, then another, followed by the sharp ringing sound of a bursting shell.

"Bravo for Roe! he has headed them off!" cried Cody, and the Indians five miles ahead were seen dashing back out of a canyon, and endeavoring to flank the lofty range of hills by swerving to the right.

"Yes, Roe has been lying in wait and has pounced upon them."

"Poor wretches! they are between two fires now."

"Sound boots and saddles, bugler, for we must press on and teach them a lesson, bitter though it is, and cruel though it seems."

"War is a terrible thing, Powell," and Captain Forrester seemed to shrink from the red punishment he was giving the Indians.

"They must learn the bitter lesson, Fred, that savagery must yield to civilization, the weak to the strong," responded Frank Powell, though he too, revealed not in the carnage.

"The fight is over now, so I'll ask to go to Eagle Canyon, Captain Forrester, and join you back at Fort Forlorn, as the boys call it," said Buffalo Bill, who cared not to fight a fallen foe longer.

"All right, Cody, and I only wish I could accompany you."

"Mark the unfortunate woman's grave in case some one may turn up who knows her," and the young captain pressed on to meet his victorious companies under Captain Roe.

The Indians, brought to bay, had turned and fought like demons, and it was not until Captain Forrester led a charge in person directly into their retreat, that they left their ponies, clambered up the steep rocks and scattered through the hills, where horses could not follow them.

"A grand victory, Captain Forrester, and may get you a majority," said Captain Roe, warmly, as the fight ended.

"Ah, Roe, it is yours, Ames's, Germaine's and Bennett's fight, for I owe my relief to you all, and but set the ball in motion by being caught in a trap."

"But what about your plot to ambush this relief force?"

"That was Texas Jack's idea, and they walked into the trap like sheep."

"We opened with artillery and carbines, then charged with revolvers and sabers, and I verily believe those Sioux are running yet."

"They lost heavily, and my loss was slight, and we captured a couple of hundred ponies."

"Getting anxious about you, we left the ambush and came on, and then came upon your race, the red-skin fugitives believing us to be their friends, I guess."

"They will remember this day for many a year, and keep up in their stronghold."

"But, have you seen their Queen?"

"She is dead, and by her own hand, when she saw the fight went against her."

"Some scout who escaped you, got to her with the news of your defeat, for she told Cody when dying that she was beaten at all points, her relief was in full flight, and so she died."

"But you will press on?"

"Oh, yes; when Ames comes up with his infantry I will mount his men on the Indian ponies, for we have captured more than enough, and press on into the Indian country to intimidate them and show that we can punish them when they force us to do so."

That night the infantry came up, and after a good rest the next morning Captain Forrester, mounting his foot soldiers, pressed on after the flying red-skins; but he did not, as he had hoped on account of his wounded arm, leave Cody behind, for that cunning scout seemed to suspect what the young captain would do, and, after burying the Renegade Queen by the side of her husband in Eagle Canyon, came on after the troops, and was ready to act as guide up into a land which, beyond Signal Mountain, none of the Braves in Buckskin had yet penetrated.

As this march is a matter of border history, I need only say that Captain Forrester forced the Sioux to break up their village and penetrate still further fastnesses, where Red Eagle became their leader, and was a conservative one toward the pale-faces, for he had not forgotten his love for the Renegade Queen nor his gratitude to Surgeon Powell who gave him his life by setting him free.

And back toward Fort Fairview, with flying colors, marched the victorious Boys in Blue, to meet at Fort Forlorn Major Denton and his gallant rescuers, who had solved the mystery of no courier arriving at the fort by finding the bodies of two of them slain and scalped by the trail, evidently ambushed by some small band of roving Sioux.

CHAPTER L.

FRED FORRESTER'S RESOLVE.

FROM "Fort Forlorn" Colonel Cassidy received by courier, from Major Denton, the first news that had come since the relief had departed to join Fred Forrester.

When the soldier courier was seen coming across the prairie, all was excitement in the fort, and pale faces flushed with hope that he would bring good news.

His horse had been hard ridden, his own face showed fatigue, but he reported promptly to the commandant and delivered his dispatches.

All waited patiently the reading of those dispatches, and then came the order to call the troops together, and the adjutant read the major's report aloud, amid cheers from the garrison.

The major told of how he had found two dead couriers, and afterward learned that they had been sent by Captain Forrester, reporting his rescue, and again that the Sioux had been terribly cut up and were being pursued to their own country.

The major also went on to say that he had found a garrison at Fort Forlorn, and had heard the story of the gallant defense and rescue, and that he had sent a company of cavalry and two companies of mounted infantry to follow Forrester's trail and serve as a support to him in case of his being forced to retreat, while he, with the remainder of his force, would camp at Fort Forlorn as a reserve, in case he was needed.

Then followed a long list that brought sorrow to many a heart, of the dead and wounded soldiers and scouts.

A week after the arrival of this dispatch, a force came in sight, and it proved to be Major Denton returning with his men, for he had received a courier from Captain Forrester telling him that he had broken up the Sioux villages and forced them to still further retreat into the mountains, so was now on his return march.

It also told of the death of the Renegade Queen.

Another week went by and back to Fairview came the victorious Boys in Blue and Braves in Buckskin, and as they marched into the fort Captain Roe was seen to step forward and instantly called out:

"Officers and men! three cheers and a tiger for our gallant commander, Captain Fred Forrester, of the —th Cavalry!"

The cheers were given with a will that made the windows of the houses in the fort rattle, and the tears came into Kate Kennerley's eyes as

she beheld officers cheering and waving who had been Fred Forrester's bitterest foes.

But they were tears of joy, for Mrs. Denton had whispered:

"He has conquered at last, Kate, for now they are glad to do him honor."

"Yes, at last, and he deserves the victory he won over himself and his pale-face foes, even more than he does for his triumph over the red-skins," responded Kate.

And as she spoke Colonel Cassidy came forward with the young commander, travel-stained, his uniform in tatters, his face haggard, but with eyes bright with the thought of his triumph.

"Here is the cause of it all, Miss Kennerley—this man, Cody, for he went off and got lost and I had to look him up, and then Roe, Ames and the others made heroes of themselves in rescuing me and my men, and so it is a case of mutual aid all around, with all our thanks due to the real hero, Buffalo Bill, yes, and his Braves in Buckskin."

"Ever modest, Captain Forrester: but what will you do now that there are no more red-skins to battle with?"

"Oh, the lion is only sleeping, Mrs. Denton, and will awaken full soon, I fear, for Indians are not readily put down."

"But Cody has a plan on hand to take a run into the mines, and I shall ask leave and accompany him, I think."

Kate Kennerley sighed, for why was it that he seemed ever so anxious to be away from the fort, to avoid her, and yet she felt that he was by no means indifferent to her.

With this remark, and a promise to dine with the colonel that evening, Fred Forrester went to his quarters and in utter fatigue threw himself upon his bed.

For a long while he lay there, and yet he did not sleep.

A number came and saw him thus and crept away, fearful of disturbing him.

At last he arose and paced the floor, his face stern, his eyes flashing.

"My God! can it be as Cody suspects?"

"Yes, it must be, it is, and I must face the only alternative I have."

"I will go there with him, and I will act."

"Is it cruel, or is it just?"

"I must, I will free myself at any cost, for does she not deserve it?"

"Is she not guilty of murder, and has she not trifled with my mercy, laughed at my threats, and disregarded my every wish and demand?"

"Yes, I will go with Cody and the end must come, cost what it may, for she means mischief, and I fear to other than myself."

"I have lived down these slurs, cruel accusations upon me, I have made men feel that I was not to be crushed, and have brought those who wronged me bitterly to my feet, as it were, for many are willing to play the sycophant now, when my star is in the ascendant."

"A short while since, an outcast officer, all hated me, yet none snubbed me; oh, no, I did not suffer them to do that."

"The clouds lifted, and now my traducers would be my friends."

"The one who has been truest through all had the most cause to doubt me, to condemn me, and for that one's sake I must act now, and I will."

"Yes, I will go with Cody to the mines, and if he is right, then may Heaven have mercy upon her head, for I never will—no, she has dared me beyond endurance."

Two days after Buffalo Bill, whose arm had healed, rode out of Fort Fairview and his companion was Fred Forrester.

Their destination was Gold Pocket City.

CHAPTER LI.

FICKLE FORTUNE.

DURING her short stay in Gold Pocket City, Bowie-Knife Bessie had managed to win so many games that she was laying up a snug little fortune for herself.

The miners seemed to be willing to lose a few dollars just to play with her, and now and then one would go in with the firm intention to break her bank.

Landlord Bony had tried that several times, and each time with a result that lessened the amount of his cash in hand.

After her meeting with Devil Dick, the woman seemed to be fairly subdued for a night or two; but then her flow of spirits came back to her, and she was the same beautiful, fascinating creature as ever.

There was not a miner in Gold Pocket who had not tried his luck against the Lady Sport, with the result against him.

So matters went on, until one night Jersey informed the Lady Sport that two strangers had arrived at the Roost.

"Who are they?" she asked.

"One is a daisy-looking fellow, who signed his name as Roy Rockland, and the other is a Chinese bigger than any miner in the Pocket."

"The gent signs after his name: 'A Sport,'—so isn't that funny, Miss Bessie? for you are a Lady Sport."

Bowie-Knife Bessie did not seem to see the pun in it that Jersey did, but she said she would soon be in her place at Poker Hall, and she supposed she would see the "Sport" there.

An hour after she entered her "den," and there, not far from her, was seated a man of striking appearance, who, Jersey whispered, was Roy Rockland.

He was dressed in a well-fitting suit of corduroy, the pants stuck in handsome top-boots, and wore a white silk shirt with a black scarf under the broad collar.

His face was an attractive one, and he looked like a man to do and dare anything.

His Chinese servant was seated near him, idly gazing about him as though he held no interest in anything.

The two seemed, however, to interest the miners, and many remarks were made regarding them, some loud enough to be overheard.

The "sport" was seated at the table with Landlord Boniface, who was playing cards with his guest, and losing, too, for the stranger held the best hands at every game.

"Ah, Mr. Rockland, there is our Queen of Fortune now, and if you can beat the Lady Sport, then you are indeed a champion card-player."

"Let me introduce you," and Boniface Bill led the stranger up to Bowie-Knife Bessie's table when their game was finished.

The Chinese followed his master closely, and Boniface Bill said:

"Miss Bessie, let me present to you a stranger in Gold Pocket, Mr. Rockland, who is a sport and would like to play a game or two with you."

"Certainly, and I am happy to meet Mr. Rockland," and Bowie-Knife Bessie was so gracious she held out her hand to the stranger.

He threw himself gracefully into a chair, with some casual remark about his happiness in meeting the Lady Sport, when a miner stepped forward and asked gruffly:

"Is that thar your Chinese nigger, Pard Dandy?"

"That is my Chinese friend, Sir Bluster," was the cool reply.

"Waal, Chinese, niggers and Injuns hain't allowed in perlite society in Gold Pocket, no-how."

"If you do not like the society of my friend, get out."

"Git out?"

"That is what I advised, and if you are wise, you'll take good advice."

"You git yerself!" and a revolver was leveled at Roy Rockland, but ere a word could be said the bully found the weapon wrenched from his grasp and he went flying heels over head over the crowd, by an exhibition of strength that was remarkable.

"Pitch him out of the door, Chinese," said Rockland, coolly resuming his seat, and the order was obeyed to the letter, for the Chinese raised the limp form and fired it out of the door.

"He got allee wantee," said Chinese with a grin as he resumed his seat, while Roy Rockland arose and facing the crowd, asked:

"Are there others here who object to the presence of my Chinese companion?"

"If so, let us settle the matter at once, for I am anxious to enjoy a game of cards."

A silence followed, and Boniface Bill said:

"This is my ranch, Mr. Rockland, and when I raise no objection I dare any one else to."

"That brute got just what he deserved; but let me congratulate you upon your marvelous strength."

This settled it, and the stranger resumed his seat and began to play with the Lady Sport.

"I hear that you have had phenomenal luck?" he said, with a smile.

"I have, sir."

"I shall break it."

She started, but said:

"You are over-confident."

"No, I know when I am in luck, and this is my lucky day, so if you do not wish to lose heavily make small bets."

"I am not to be bluffed, sir," was the haughty reply.

"Far be it from me to offer to do so."

"I merely advise you, as I advised that bully awhile since."

"I, too, decline to accept advice, so name your sum."

"I leave it to you."

"Then we will play for a thousand."

Rather high, but let it go, and there was a silence between them, the Lady Sport, in spite of her smile, showing that she did not like the man, in fact seemed to dread him.

Roy Rockland played with apparent recklessness; but he won the game, yes, and the next, and the next, until the Lady Sport had lost ten thousand dollars, and with a smile that was positively wicked, arose from her table and said:

"Another time, Mr. Rockland, we will try our luck one against the other."

"I am always at your service," was the polite response, and the sport was turning away when the miners, who had been worked into a rage at his success against the Lady Sport, crowded about him, one remarking:

"No, yer don't go, pard, for yer is a sharp,

and every dollar o' that money yer gives back ter Bowie Bessie!"

"Hold! Back, all of you, for this man is ne card-sharp, for I vouch for him!"

The words rung out through Poker Hall, and the speaker suddenly confronted the angry crowd, while in chorus they uttered his name:

"Buffalo Bill!"

A startled cry broke from the woman's lips at the utterance of the name, and with a bound she passed through the window and disappeared.

"Do you hear, I vouch for this gentleman, pards."

"Is it enough?"

"It are."

"All right, Bill."

"Your word goes, Bill."

"Every time."

"You bet!"

And many other like expressions showed that the famous scout was not unknown in Gold Pocket City.

"I thank you, Cody, for I was in an ugly scrape, which would have caused Chinese and myself trouble to get out of."

"When did you arrive?"

"Half an hour ago, and I met the chief of the Rocky Mountain Detectives yesterday, and he told me if I needed aid here in some work on hand, to look up Roy Rockland."

CHAPTER LII.

ROY ROCKLAND.

"So you know me, Cody, as I am?" asked Roy Rockland, as he sat in his room with the scout, after the scene in Poker Hall.

"I only know that I met Chief Cook, as I told you, and hinted to him the reason of my coming to Gold Pocket City, and he told me that you had come on here the day before, and if I needed aid to call on you, for you had authority to act."

"Let me explain, then, for I owe it to you now to do so."

"I told you when we met on the plains—"

"When you you saved our lives, you mean."

"Let that pass, pray, and listen to me."

"I told you and Captain Forrester, that I was a gambler, and so I am."

"I took to gambling naturally, and was phenomenally lucky."

"I invested my winnings in a mine, and was robbed of it, driven from it, and nearly killed."

"I swore revenge, and took the best means to get it, and those who wronged me are now either dead or in prison."

"This tracking of those men down gave me a liking for Secret Service work, and I joined Cook and became valuable to him."

"To capture the Gold-Grabbers I became one of their band, and one by one gave them up to justice."

"I at the same time was on the track of a youth who had been stolen from his parents, who were vastly rich, and never returned to them in spite of rewards offered."

"I also had orders to look after a woman who was a murderess, and her photograph was sent to me."

"A short while ago I met two men whom I believed to have once belonged to the band of Gold-Grabbers; so I proposed to them to hold up a coach on the Overland, and they agreed."

"I knew that by a certain coach a man would be a passenger who was a defaulter for a large sum, and I wished to capture him."

"I halted the coach, and a woman frustrated my plan, which was to capture the defaulter and then run him in with my two worthies, who had proven themselves the road-thieves I believed them."

"This woman got the drop on me, made me a prisoner, and Rainbow Rob shot one of my men and drove over the other two."

"Fortunately I was not bound, so made my escape and returned to my camp, where I had left my Chinese servant, while the coach went on with the defaulter and my man Carlos, badly hurt."

"Upon my way to the camp I crossed the trail at a point I had halted the coach, and there found a leather wallet."

"It was the one belonging to the defaulter, and had the stolen thousands in it in large bills."

"He lost it, was penniless, so went to work in the mines, and my man Carlos was hanged by the miners as soon as he had recovered from his injuries."

"But the woman's face haunted me, and I went to the Overland and wrote East for full particulars and another photograph, and also expressed the wallet to the bank, stating I would catch my man also, for there is a reward of ten thousand offered for him."

"After leaving Fort Fairview I started here, but went up to see Chief Cook, so only arrived to-day; but I come fully prepared for emergencies."

"To-night I played with the Lady Sport, and she is my game."

"She was a Miss Ruby Roberts, married Fred Forrester when a cadet at West Point, poisoned

his uncle to get his money, then intending to get rid of him and marry an old lover of her childhood.

"His uncle, angry at his secret marriage, made a will, cutting him off; but when dying, it seems, made a last will, intrusting it to a bosom friend, who, with the witness to it, met with a railroad accident and it was lost.

"So they said nothing about the late will, and the property was to go to charity if not claimed by a long unheard-of brother after a certain number of years.

"That time is up within ten days, and if not claimed Captain Forrester gets his inheritance, for the last will was found and proven genuine."

"I am glad of this," said Buffalo Bill.

"So am I, for the noble fellow deserves it.

"But to this wife.

"She is a murderess, and more, I have all the proofs, and she is as wicked as sin herself.

"Now, Cody, you know who I am and let me say that I am here to arrest the defaulter, and the Lady Sport, while, in a boy here they call Jersey, I have found the young fellow stolen some years ago when but ten years of age."

"I congratulate you indeed, and let me tell you that in a cabin on the mountains, Captain Forrester is waiting my coming here to see if the Lady Sport is really his wife as I took an idea that she was.

"If so, he knows that she returned West for mischief, and means to bring charges against her as a murderess."

"I can save him that unpleasant duty at least.

"But I am glad to know he is near, and delighted to find you here.

"Now go with me while I rope in my game, beginning first with Jersey the boy, then the defaulter, and last, but not least, the Lady Sport.

"You will help me?"

"Gladly," and the two men left the room together.

An hour after six persons rode out of Gold Pocket City.

They were a Chinnee and a man in irons—the defaulter.

Roy Rockland and the Lady Sport, the latter with her hands bound securely.

Then came Buffalo Bill in the lead, with the boy Jersey riding by his side.

They were on their way up to a cabin on the mountain where Buffalo Bill had left Captain Fred Forrester.

CHAPTER LIII.

UNLOOKED-FOR RETRIBUTION.

UPON a point, or lofty spur, of a mountain, overhanging a valley through which dashed a swiftly-flowing river, stood a humble cabin which had long been without an occupant.

Its builder and owner had been murdered there, and so the miners called it the Haunted Cabin.

Here it was that Buffalo Bill, to whom the spot was known, had taken Fred Forrester to stay, while he went alone to Gold Pocket, several miles away.

With a fire on the hearth, and his blankets, the young officer made himself quite comfortable, for he was amply supplied with edibles.

But he could not sleep, and springing to his feet, began to pace the floor.

He did not see the face of a man peering in upon him, nor did he know that he had been tracked for days.

The fire burned brightly and revealed the officer's face distinctly, and then the man lowered a revolver and said hoarsely:

"Great God! what would I have done?"

After a moment he knocked at the door.

Fred Forrester threw it open, but beheld not the scout, but a most remarkable-looking personage there.

"Are you Lieutenant Forrester?"

"I am."

"Did you ever see me before?"

"Well, yes, I think I have."

"Yes, I am not one to easily forget; but where did we meet?"

"Some men had you, accusing you of murder, and were about to hang you as I came along, if you are that man."

"I am, and you made them surrender me to you, and saved my life."

"Yes, though I half believed you guilty; but they had no right to hang you on suspicion."

"I am the man, and I have never forgotten you."

"I did not even know your name; but I remembered your face and form, for neither is easily forgotten."

"Well, sir, I have knocked about, and been knocked about, until men call me Devil Dick, though I guess I deserve the name."

"Once I was known by the name of Oscar Ralston, and I loved a pretty girl away back in New York State."

"I went wrong and came West, and I met her

some weeks ago, and she told me how her life had been ruined, and by you."

"Great God! By me! Man, you lie!"

"I do not; but now I see you, and know what you did for me, I believe that she does."

"She told me she would marry me if you were out of the way, and I vowed to kill you and make her a widow."

"I went to Fort Fairview and found you had come here, so tracked you, and to-night saw you come to this cabin with Buffalo Bill."

"When he left I determined to kill you, and when I saw you I recognized the man who had rescued me from death."

"Now, Captain Forrester, upon your honor as an officer and a man, tell me all about Ruby Roberts and yourself."

"Gladly will I tell you the whole truth; and more, I will say that I came to Gold Pocket to see if the woman calling herself the Lady Sport is my wife, for my wife she is."

Then he told the whole story of the woman's sins to gain gold, her perfidy, and the strange eventful life she had led.

"Captain Forrester, I loved that woman with all my soul."

"She is as vile as I am, and now I hate her, for I believe every word you have uttered—Ha!"

And the man sprung behind the door as Buffalo Bill and those with him entered.

"Ah! this is your work, Fred Forrester," hissed the woman, as her eyes fell upon him.

"Yes, Ruby, you must no longer be allowed to kill, curse and wither all you come in contact with."

"You have brought yourself to a fearful fate," was the low, but stern utterance of the officer.

"Ruby, you lied to me, and as life no longer holds a charm for me, you go with me to death!"

The deep-toned voice startled all, and before a hand could be raised Devil Dick sprung toward the woman, grasped her in his arms, and, with a bound, had cleared the cliff a few feet from the cabin door.

A wild shriek rung out from the woman's lips, a burst of mocking laughter from the man's, and they went down, down three hundred feet, and plunged into the foaming torrent, which swept them away beyond the power of man to find.

CHAPTER LIV.

CONCLUSION.

BACK to his parents went Jersey, the Kid, to find a loving welcome, and to become a gentleman in the end, worthy his name and riches, while, so in love had he become with the army, that he got a cadetship at West Point and is now an honored officer commanding an outpost upon the frontier, about which he seems to have a vast deal of information.

Tenderfoot Tom kept his pledge to Buffalo Bill, so that the scout kept the secret faithfully of how he had once gone wrong.

Poor, brave Texas Jack lies buried up at Leadville, where he died some years ago, but his memory is still green in the hearts of his comrades.

Roy Rockland continued in his border detective work, with Chinnee as an ally, and won fame and fortune, and to this day he and Buffalo Bill are "pards unto death."

As for our army friends, Colonel Cassidy was retired with a brigadier-general's rank, and Major Denton, after being promoted to a colonelcy, resigned and settled down in an elegant home on the Hudson, where his wife is known as the most charming of hostesses.

And Fred Forrester, the one time outcast officer?

After the fearful death of his wife, so beautiful yet so wicked, he obtained a leave of several months and went East, where he came in possession of the fortune left by his uncle.

Then he returned to Fort Fairview, sought Kate Kennerley and told her the whole strange, sad story of his life, and that his lips were no longer sealed, and begged her to become his bride.

He was her *beau ideal* among men, the only one she had ever loved, and with a heart full of joy she consented, and they were married at Fort Fairview, Major Denton giving the bride away.

At the request of his lovely wife Fred Forrester gave up the army and is now an honored citizen of the metropolis, where few of their friends suspect the romance that their two lives have known.

As for Buffalo Bill, he is living over in mimic scenes the deeds of his wild life upon the frontier, and is a hero among heroes even in foreign lands, for his name is known the wide world over.

But should the tocsin of war sound throughout the land, calling brave men to duty, Buffalo Bill would again seek the wild West to once more lead his gallant Braves in Buckskin.

THE END.

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Rum's Work. (Temperance). For four gents.
The Fatal Mistake. For two young ladies.
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Retribution. For a number of boys.

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A Poet's Perplexities. For six gentlemen.
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A Safety Rule. For three ladies.
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The Boy Who Wins. For six gentlemen.
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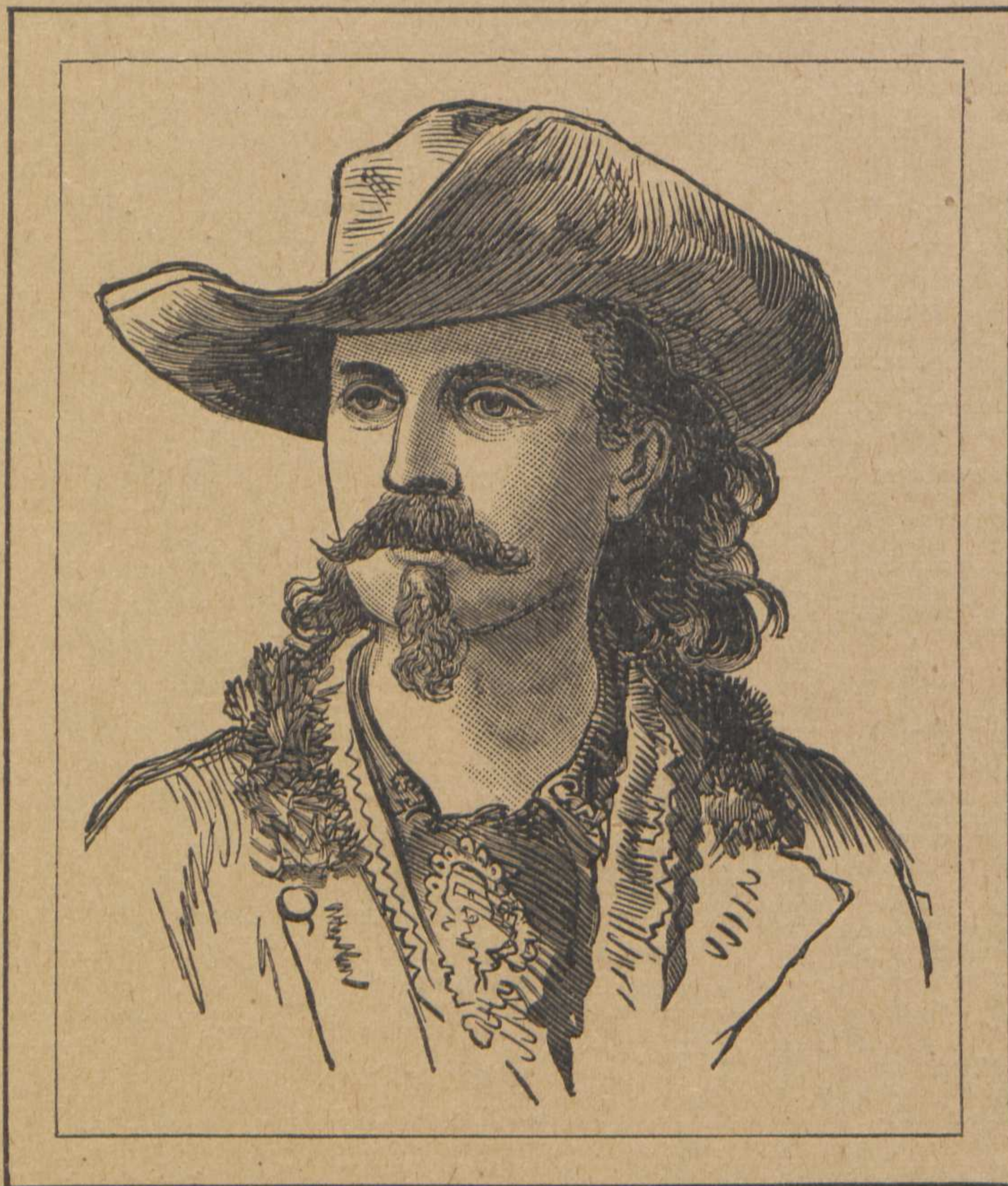
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